

This December's

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT TRACHTENBERG

THIS PAGE: Fossil Townsman Automatic Leather Watch Black (\$215).

OPPOSITE PAGE: Makeup by Cyndie Lou Boehm, hair by Courtney Benedetti, both for Tracey Mattingly.

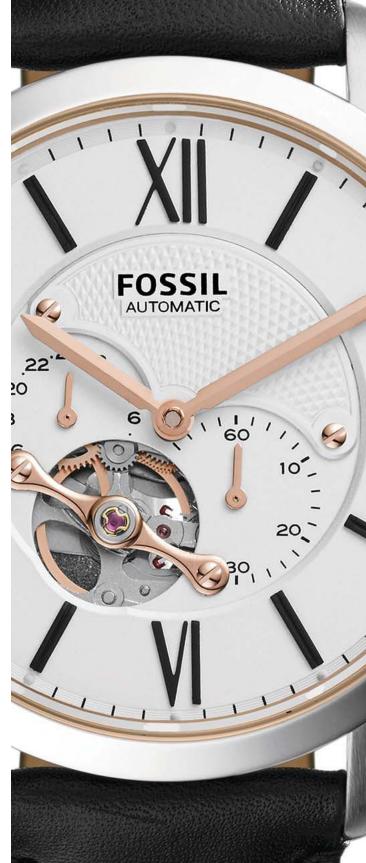
Santa suit, on loan from the North Pole.





GIFT CURIOUSLY



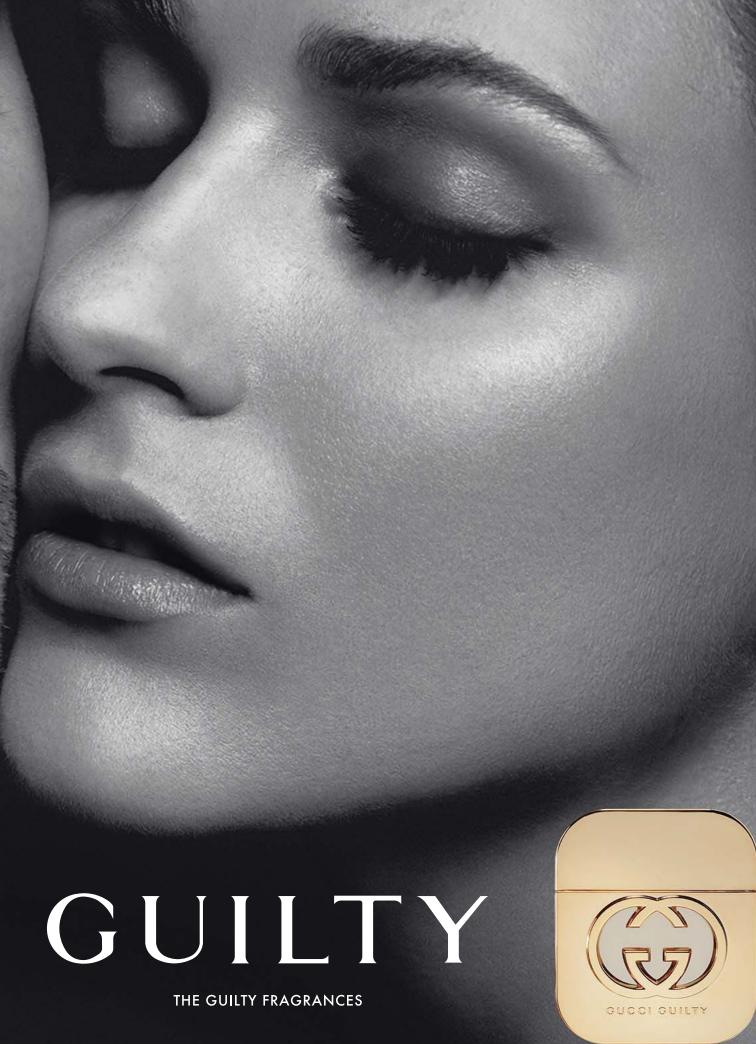




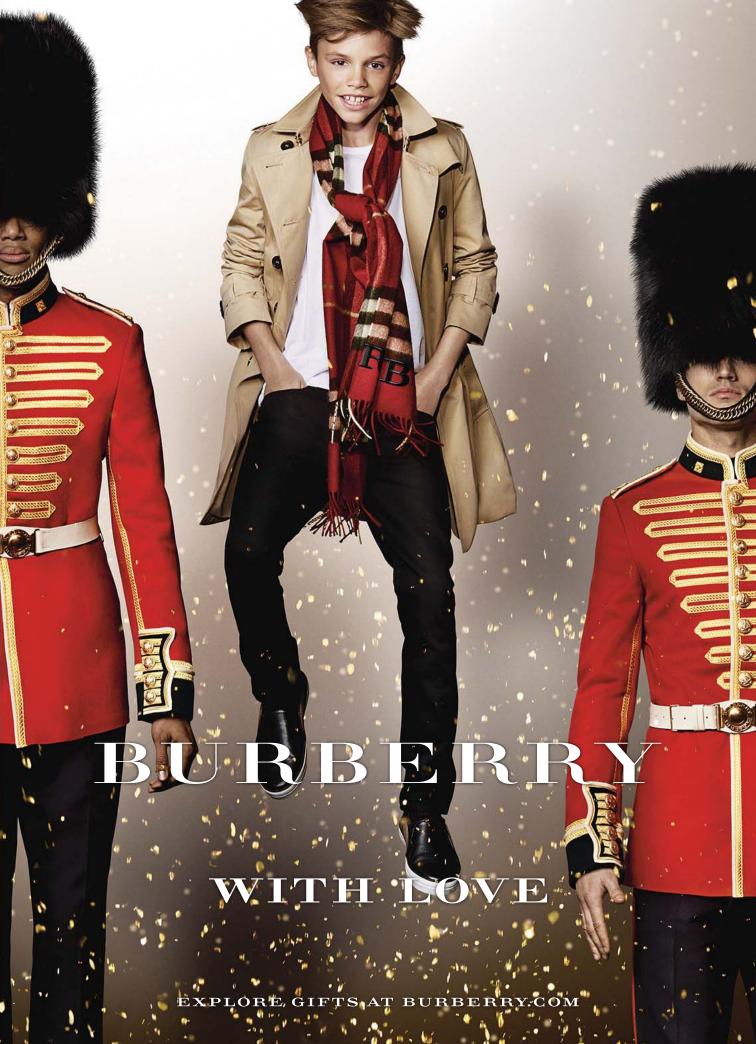


SUCCI GUILTY

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TOMMY - HILFIGER

UNDERWEAR





SEVER COM







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WHERE THE GIFTS ARE

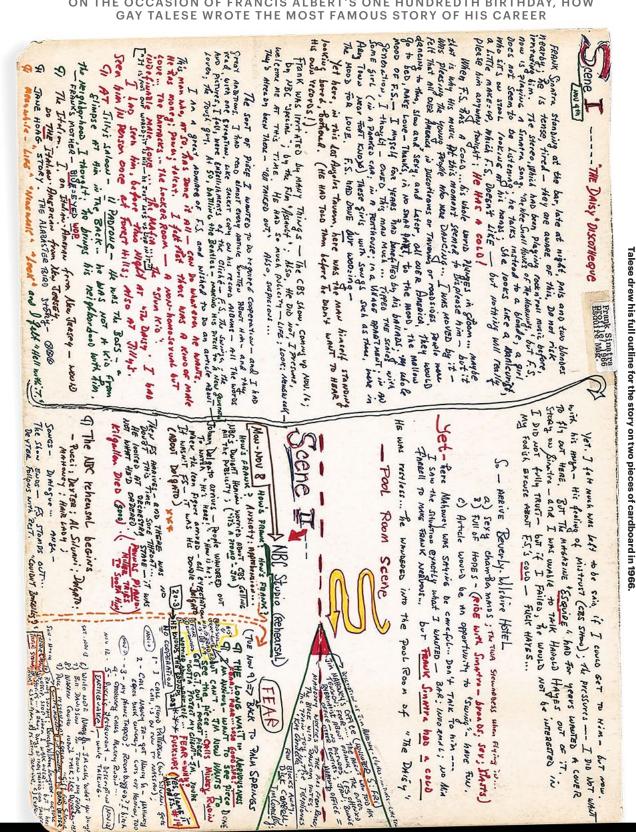




MADE SWISS

THE COLD OPEN

ON THE OCCASION OF FRANCIS ALBERT'S ONE HUNDREDTH BIRTHDAY, HOW



FRANK SINATRA HAS A COLD









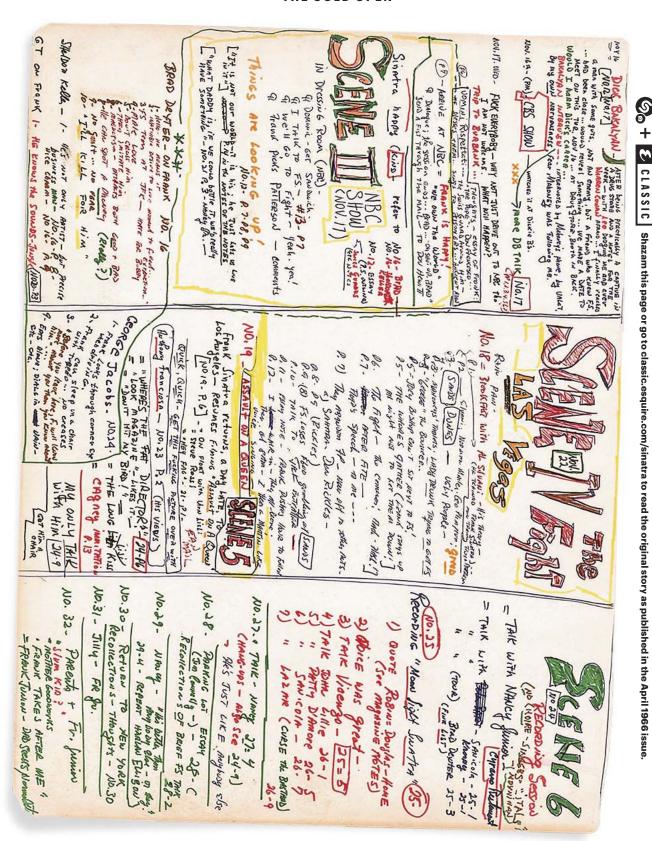




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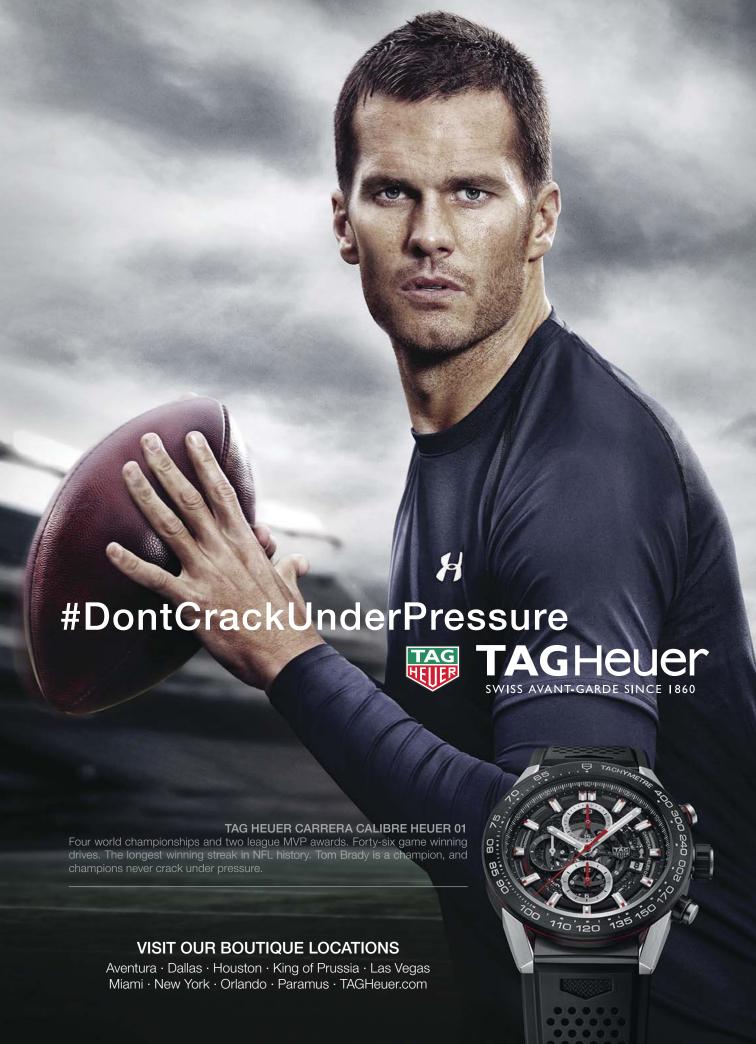


THE COLD OPEN



In honor of the one hundredth anniversary of Frank Sinatra's birth on December 12, Taschen is publishing a beautiful limited-edition version of "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold," with photographs by Phil Stern and notes by Gay Talese, including this outline.





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GOOD LORD, JIMMY FALLON

MIGHT SAVE US ALL

He is always like that—bright, generous, *up*. And he can make you feel that way, too. What the hell? By Scott Raab / PAGE 116

HERE'S TO YOUR YEAR: A Dinner Party

We picked eleven people who had a damn fine 2015—on TV (like Trevor Noah), with a book (like Sloane Crosley), or delivering a perfect one-liner (like Cecily Strong)—and then put them in some nice clothes and fed them (our tab). They wouldn't leave. / PAGE 123





THE J. J. ABRAMS STORY

The magical things that happened to the chubby Star Wars fanboy now in charge of . . . (dramatic music here) . . . Star Wars. All real. No CGI.

By Mike Sager / PAGE 134

ONE HOUR IN CHARLESTON

Before the visitor ended their prayers.

Reported fiction by

Tom Junod / PAGE 142

THE AMERICAN FUTURE

We have some decisions to make about our country even before we choose the next president. Several hard decisions we've been putting off, like:

Do we want to deal with the changing climate?

Are we going to fix our roads and bridges? Should we keep Obamacare?

And ... guns, immigration, taxes.

With the help of the researchers and scholars at the Brookings Institution, here is our concise guide to the choices we face—with their costs and consequences—before it's too late to choose. / PAGE 149

PLUS

Stuck

Why American society is no longer mobile, hopeful, and broadly bountiful. And how to fix that.

By Richard Reeves / PAGE 154

The Billionaire Problem

They want to run things.
But even as they try, some of them agree
it's not a good idea.
By John H. Richardson / PAGE 162

ON THE COVER: JIMMY FALLON PHOTOGRAPHED EXCLUSIVELY FOR ESQUIRE BY ROBERT TRACHTENBERG. CARDIGAN, SHIRT, TROUSERS, AND SOCKS BY POLO RALPH LAUREN CHILDREN'S. SHOES BY FLORSHEIM KIDS. BOW TIE BY BROOKS BROTHERS. PRODUCED BY NATHALIE AKIYA FOR KRANKY PRODUCTIONS. SET AND COSTUME DESIGN BY TODD WIGGINS FOR MARY HOWARD STUDIO. CHILDREN'S STYLING BY MARIAH WALKER FOR ART DEPARTMENT. GROOMING BY CYNDIE LOU BOEHM, HAIR BY COURTINEY BENEDETTI, BOTH FOR TRACEY MATTINGLY. SPECIAL-EFFECTS MAKEUP BY ARI ROSENBAUM.

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"Cons" By Jess Walter

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By Brian Frazer



SHAZAM THIS ISSUE

See this logo? It won't be the last time it appears in these pages. Each time you happen upon it, pull out your phone, open the Shazam app, and take a photo of the target element. You'll then be sent to something special—like the online store created by Bespoke Post for Esquire's gift selections, or a short story or a video, or Esquire Classic, our new online archive of every issue of Esquire ever. For instance, if you Shazam this very box, you'll jump to December 1998, the last time we dressed up our culture's preeminent beacon of joy as Santa Claus for our cover. (Hint: The cover line was "Murray Christmas!") Enjoy.



ANOTHER GIFT TO GIVE!

(Or to ask for...)

We recommend a whole bunch of great gifts later on in this issue (starting on page 96). We've got another one here: It's a book we made, a collection of

our interviews about life wisdom-What I've Learned: The Meaning of Life According to 65 Artists, Athletes, Leaders & Legends-and it's available now, at places like Amazon. Among the venerable people we interviewed are Robert De Niro and Helen Mirren, Sting and André 3000, Joe Biden and George H. W. Bush (with Barbara), Slash, Schwarzenegger, Schumer. Consider it instead of that other book you were going to give.

Esquire

THE ESSENTIAL

Twenty or so beautiful and/or practical things that

people will keep and use (and use and use) and thank

you for well past the holidays.

AND GIFTS FOR WOMEN

PAGE 114

Advice from our counterparts at ELLE.

Gift Gui



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DARE GREATLY

Unfathomable

Sometimes reporting fails us. Sometimes reporting—journalism—is the search for an essential truth that remains infinitely elusive. Journalism can come up short because of a lack of evidence, or because of the hostility of those who know, or because secrets are buried, or because even those involved aren't certain what really happened or why.

And still we need to know. Especially when an atrocity happens—and even more so when the same atrocity happens again and again. It is simply not enough that these tragedies remain "unfathomable."

Nothing fills me with more despair than the parade of mass shootings that have only accelerated in frequency since Columbine in the spring of 1999. Since then, this magazine has made attempts to respond to them and understand their causes, and I have to say that we have not succeeded.

I remember a long time ago when a great writer felt a similar impotence in the face of barbarous events. It was the early 1960s, and the outrage was over the killing of leaders of the burgeoning civilrights movement. On June 12, 1963, Medgar Evers was shot and killed in his own driveway in Jackson, Mississippi. Eudora Welty, who also lived in Jackson, was so enraged and so frustrated by her own failure to understand that she committed fiction in response. It was the only way, she felt, to get at truth.

A few weeks later, decades before Byron De La Beckwith would be brought to justice, she published "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" in *The New Yorker*—a fictional account of the assassination from



inside the mind of the murderer. In an interview with William F. Buckley Jr. years later, here is how she explained the story that had poured out of her: "I thought to myself, 'I've lived here all my life. I know the kind of mind that did this.'"

Following this past June's horrific shooting at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, the element of the tragedy that has stayed in our minds and chilled and horrified us is the fact that the perpetrator sat with his eventual victims for an hour before he pulled out his Glock .45 caliber and assassinated nine of them. One hour.

After the killings, the murderer reportedly told police that he nearly hadn't been able to go through with his horrendous mission because during that hour everyone in Bible study had been so nice to him. Two days later, at his bail hearing, one of the survivors told the killer, "We welcomed you... we enjoyed you."

One hour of human contact had almost been enough to break the spell. Almost.

Tom Junod has spent a lot of time trying to understand mass shooters. Last year, he spent hours interviewing a young man who was stopped before committing a massacre with two friends. He has spent time with the people—inside government and out-who are tasked with interdicting potential killers. After Charleston. we asked Tom about that one hour. Since that conversation, he has spent time in Charleston and at the church; he has gone to the gun store and shooting range where the murderer bought his weapon. He has studied the news accounts and the police reports and the memories of survivors. He knows a lot. And he knows too little. Like Ms. Welty, he's decided that the search for truth falls short amid the search of facts. Rather, he thought, insight might arise from an informed act of the imagination. See page 142.

DAVID GRANGER

EDITOR IN CHIEF

NEXT MONTH IN ESOUIRE

ACTUALLY, IT'LL OFFICIALLY BE NEXT YEAR.

- We try to make a tiny bit of sense of the Republican presidential field. The Dems', too.
- Oh, and we're doing a major national survey of what voters really think with NBC News.
- One way or another, Bob Odenkirk is gonna be in the issue.
 And, finally, we will announce a major yearlong initiative that will make us all better people.

ESQUITE ARNOLD GINGRICH (1903-1976) FOUNDING EDITOR

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STYLE AGENDA

The Dad 2.0 Summit

The Dad 2.0 Summit is celebrating its 5th year as the preeminent conference where bloggers, marketers, media, and parents redefine fatherhood for the modern man. Esquire is proud to be back as the National Media Sponsor and host of the Esquire Live Lounge, where we interview influencers in a movement that is transforming the lives of men and their kids all over the world.

Join us February 18-20, 2016, at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Washington DC, and follow all the important news about tickets, speakers, and sponsor activations by subscribing to the newsletter at dad2summit.com, or by following @dad2summit on Twitter and Instagram.



Wally's Wine & Spirits

Recently named the "undisputed king of fine wines in Los Angeles and beyond" by zagat.com, Wally's Wine & Spirits has provided an unparalleled level of expertise and knowledgeable customer service since 1968. The exact reason novices, collectors and connoisseurs alike have made Wally's their prime destination for thousands of hard-to-find wines, beers and spirits. Wally's flagship location is in Beverly Hills, and its many unique products can also be purchased online at www.wallywine.com and shipped worldwide.







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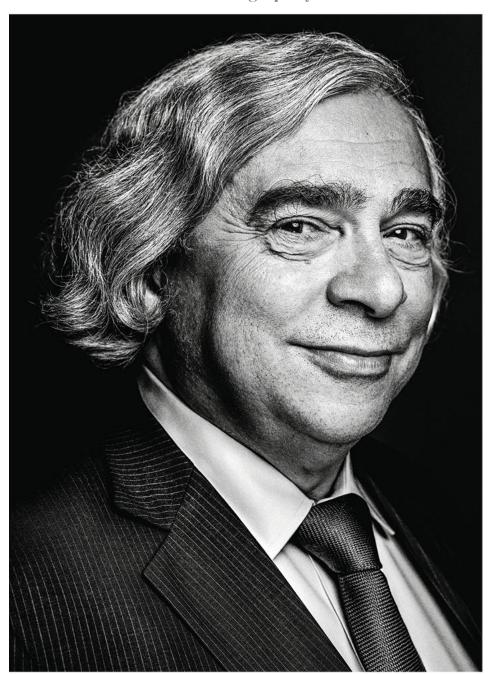


Man at His Best

The ESQ&A

What? You don't know this guy? It's energy secretary **ERNEST MONIZ**, talking to **SCOTT RAAB** about the Iran deal, hostile committees, the Red Sox, and one impressive head of hair

Photograph by BENEDICT EVANS



In town for a Colbert taping, Moniz talks with Raab in the car from LaGuardia Airport before visiting a Bronx high school.

SCOTT RAAB: As a Boston sports fan and a man of science, do you find it disturbing that the Patriots have to cheat in order to win a Super Bowl?

ERNEST MONIZ: As the judge ruled, there was no convincing evidence of that. And I was there at that game. I was on the sidelines, even, and I saw no evidence of any doctoring of the footballs.

SR: That's the only question I have....

EM: Okay, excellent. SR: No, it's actually not the only question.

EM: I could tell you about my first-pitch delivery [at Fenway Park on April 22, 2014].

SR: How did it feel?

EM: The important thing is that I did a full Luis Tiant delivery.

SR: With the hesitation?

EM: One-hundred-eightydegree rotation, a look to God, spin around three quarters, throw a strike. There you go. SR: What goes through your

mind when you're being crossexamined by hostile members of Congress? Are you ever tempted to just go, "Look, this is nuclear physics"?

EM: Not really, no. My interpretation of my responsibility is in fact to have lots of dialogue with the members. It's really very unusual for questions that are sent to me to have this flavor of "gotcha."

SR: With the Paris climatechange conference upcoming, I worry about the public's ability to discern information from spin.

EM: Certainly the climate issue has become incredibly politi-

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cized. Any honest view of the data would at a minimum suggest a view along the lines of "We sure need an insurance policy." The greenhouse effect clearly is not anything that's in any question. A global response is needed. There are certainly policy issues—how much does the industrialized world do first?—that are quite legitimate. So that's what I'm prepared to discuss, as opposed to really unproductive discussions about whether human activity is driving global warming. I didn't go to Washington to debate what's not debatable.

SR: You seem delighted with the Iran-deal treaty.

EM: There are many parts of this agreement that go well beyond the expectations and maybe even dreams of nonproliferation experts across the country. This idea that somehow we got snookered is...at best I would say amusing.

SR: What about what are now constantly being referred to as "side deals" –

EM: "Secret side deals." SR: Is there something there to demonize?

EM: There is no constructive purpose for this term, which is completely off the mark. The agreement accomplished exactly what it was supposed to accomplish. "Secret side deal" is really a complete mischaracterization.

SR: You're taping Colbert later today. Do you feel like a star at this point?

EM: I just do my job.

SR: But you're the guy with the hair! Looks fresh.

EM: My wife was down just days ago, and so she got the scissors. It happens every six to eight weeks.

SR: You have a certain cachet. The hair's part of it.

EM: I just haven't changed it since 1970. That's all.

SR: Do you drive a hybrid? EM: I'm not going there.

SR: You're not?

EM: I'm not going there.

SR: So: No hybrid.

EM: I didn't say that. The only thing I will say is that I have a 16-year-old car that just hit 80,000 miles.

SR: What was it like negotiating side by side with John Kerry? EM: First of all, the idea of having two Cabinet members doing a negotiation together is probably a first in and of itself. It's easy to imagine how that can go wrong, and here it went absolutely right. We were really feeding off each other in many ways. I mean, I knew John before, but I got to know him a lot better. The closer you get and the more personal with him, the more you like what you see. He's got a great sense of humor. You know, we completed the Lausanne framework on April the Second....

SR: There's a picture of the two of you high-fiving in Lausanne during preliminary Iran negotiations in March. What was that about?

EM: John was coming out of a crepe restaurant that I had introduced him to some days earlier as I was heading there for lunch. And he came out, a big, beaming smile on his face, and we did a double highfive. Pictures all over the place. "They must have a deal." It was



John Kerry and Moniz celebrate finding the perfect crepes in Lausanne during negotiations on the Iran arms deal in March. (This is not one of those wacky magazine captions. Apparently the crepes were that good.)

just about the crepes.

SR: He showed courage under fire with the broken leg.

EM: The last negotiation, which went 19 straight days, John was in clear discomfort with his leg, but man, he just was tough. He never broke the negotiation to say, "Look, I've gotta go lie down" or anything like this. He's a tough guy. And he really just gritted through it. SR: What's next for you? EM: I have no horizon beyond

January 20, 2017. SR: Do you miss the academic

life? EM: I don't have that much

time to miss it, to be honest, but I think the one thing you do miss about the academic life is the students.

SR: Are you sought after by private industry?

EM: I cannot discuss that. SR: That's fine.

EM: Any such approach I have to report to the general counsel. For ethics reasons... EM: [The secretary is presented with a sandwich.] Oh, it is cut in half. Excellent. But I do need to shed half of this, if anybody wants it.

SR: I'm still working on the nicotine lozenge. I have substance issues across the entire breadth of human experience. EM: Solid, liquid, and gas? All three forms of matter?

SR: Yes, sir. By the way, do you own a Red Sox cap?

EM: I do indeed. I wear it backward. I have my no. 23 Red Sox shirt in my office.

SR: Who was 23?

EM: Luis Tiant, who, by the way, is a wonderful person. **SR:** What are you reading?

EM: Right now, not enough time to read, but my vacation book this year was The Girls of Atomic City. Denise Kiernan. SR: Los Alamos?

EM: Oak Ridge. It is really interestina.

SR: Do you collect anything? EM: I have what some might consider unusual art in our house.

SR: Like what?

EM: [We have] a huge collage done on an aluminum backing by Denise Milan, a Brazilian artist. A huge part of it is dead sticks, which is kind of the destruction of the rain forest. then there at the bottom there's a whole set of cattle, and on top of the sticks there's a crucible of gold flowing down, and it comes on top of one of the cows, and there are different interpretations. I consider that the Redeemer, in my optimistic view. Save the rain forest.

SR: Capital-R Redeemer? EM: Capital-R.

SR: Are you a man of faith? EM: Different kinds of faith. SR: Did you have a hero growing up? Einstein? EM: Ted Williams. 12

THE ESQUIRE DOSSIER

ERNEST MONIZ

Date of birth: December 22, 1944

Which makes him: 70 Hometown: Fall River. Massachusetts

Spouse: Naomi Moniz, a Brazilian scholar and retired Georgetown professor

Who insists: That he pronounce his Portuguese surname Moan-EEZE, not MOAN-is.

Favorite sports team (as a fan): The Boston Red Sox Favorite sports team

(as a player): His New England Over-the-Hill Soccer League team,

the Needham Relics **Preferred position:**

Selected highlights from his résumé:

Head of the MIT department of physics; director of the MIT Laboratory for Energy and the Environment; undersecretary of the Department of Energy.

Despite which he might actually be best known for: His hairdo.

Which has earned him comparisons to: The Quaker Oats Man; Benjamin Franklin;

Beethoven: Javier Bardem in No Country for Old Men.

And has been described as: "The best hair in the Cabinet since 1794.' **Another triumph**

worth noting: His role in brokering the Iran nuclear deal in Vienna. To which he brought: An MIT onesie that says "CuTe" (the periodic symbols for copper and tellurium) as a gift for the grandchild

of his Iranian counter-

part. Ali Akbar Salehi.

Drink used to toast

the deal: Madeira, the same Portuguese wine that the Founding Fathers drank after signing the Declaration of Independence. Number of times he invoked "off the record" rights during this interview: Four Number of times he was laughing while he said it: Two His response when Scott Raab asked if he ever talks to "dumb people": "There's an obvious answer I could make...which I will not."

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-•8:1:3•-

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From Taschen's new coffee-table version of "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold," featuring a new introduction by Gay Talese and photos by Phil Stern.

Esquire, Now with Sound

Introducing the Esquire Classic podcast, featuring Sinatra and many more of our greatest stories—and subjects—of all time

A couple months ago, we introduced you to Esquire Classic, our complete digital archive of every issue and article from 1933 to today. Now, with our partner PRX (which runs Radiotopia, This American Life, The Moth Radio Hour, and other amazing radio programs), we have a new podcast to go with it. Every two weeks, our host, David Brancaccio (whose main gig is public radio's Marketplace), invites a guest—a writer, comedian, actor, historian—to discuss a famous story from Esquire's vault and explore its lasting relevance and impact. It's entertaining as hell, and totally free.

Read a few excerpts from stories featured on the podcast below, then go to iTunes or classic.esquire.com/podcast to subscribe. Or better yet, Shazam the photo above.

Frank Sinatra Has a Cold

Sinatra with a cold is Picasso without paint, Ferrari without fuel—only worse. For the common cold robs Sinatra of that uninsurable jewel, his voice, cutting into the core of his confidence, and it affects not only his own psyche but also seems to cause a kind of psychosomatic nasal drip within dozens of people who work for him, drink with him, love him, depend on him for their own welfare and stability. A Sinatra with a cold can, in a small way, send vibrations through the entertainment industry and beyond as surely as a President of the United States, suddenly sick, can shake the national economy.

The Tinkerings of Robert Noyce BY TOM WOLFE

Even for a machine as simple as a radio the individual transistors had to be wired to-

gether, by hand, until you ended up with a little panel that looked like a road map of West Virginia. As for a computer—the wires inside a computer were sheer spaghetti.

Noyce had figured out a solution. But fabricating it was another matter. There was something primitive about cutting individual transistors out of sheets of silicon and then wiring them back together in various series. Why not put them all on a single piece of silicon without wires?

Fifth Avenue, Uptown

Now I am perfectly aware that there are other slums in which white men are fighting for their lives, and mainly losing. I know that blood is also flowing through those streets and that the human damage there is incalculable. People are continually pointing out to me the wretchedness of white people in order to console me for the wretchedness of blacks. But an itemized account of the American failure does not console me and it should not console anyone else. That hundreds of thousands of white people are living, in effect, no better than the "niggers" is not a fact to be regarded with complacency. The social and moral bankruptcy suggested by this fact is of the bitterest, most terrifying kind.

A VERY CLASSIC CHRISTMAS

Struggling to figure out what to get your father or—Christ-kill-me-before-my-wife-does—your father-in-law? How about every page, story, cover, photo, drink recipe, and bad joke Esquire has ever published? Seriously. Get it here, be done with it. classic.esquire.com/qift



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Funny*Joke from a Beautiful Woman

AS TOLD BY KARLA SOUZA

A MAN WALKS INTO a lawyer's office and says, "Excuse me, what's your rate?" The lawyer says, "Fifty dollars for three questions." The man is shocked. "Isn't that a little steep?" "Yes," says the lawyer. "What's your third question?"

THE JOKESTER: You may have missed it, but Karla Souza has already been on the cover of Esquire. Well, the Mexican edition of Esquire. The 29-year-old is a star in her native country, having appeared in the two highest-grossing Mexican films in history, 2013's We Are the Nobles and Instructions Not Included. So how did she capitalize on her record-breaking movie career? By scrapping it. "I felt it was time for a new challenge, to start from zero," she says. Just a few months after moving to L.A., Souza landed the role of a conniving law student on Shonda Rhimes's latest melodrama, How to Get Away with Murder. Her next goal: "To act in every language." Not so crazy, considering Souza has already performed in English, Spanish, and French (and has been making her way through learn-in-your-car Italian). For now, she's just enjoying the privacy and creative freedom that come with being a relative unknown in the States. Given how long her anonymity lasted in Mexico, she might want to start looking at property in Italy.

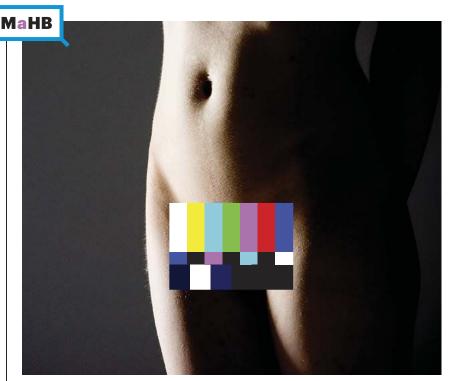




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The "Trans" Trend: **An Assessment**

(Upshot: It's a mess.) **By STEPHEN MARCHE**

Loathing and fascination run side by side in the currents of American sexuality, which is why to be transgender in America right now is to be threatened and worshipped at the same time. The U.S. Department of Justice, not an institution prone to exaggeration, described the level of sexual violence faced by trans people as "shockingly high." Half of them will be the victims of such violence, and hate crimes against transgender men and women rose by 13 percent last year. Transphobia is brutal and spreading; its spread has been accompanied by sweeping cultural transphilia. There is the Oscar-worthy performance of Eddie Redmayne in The Danish Girl; About Ray, a domestic drama about a New York family dealing with an adolescent daughter mid-transition; and season two of Transparent on Amazon. Recently, Vanity Fair even put out a "Trans America" special issue starring Caitlyn Jenner, like it does for Marilyn Monroe and the Royal Family. Transgender people are the obsession of the moment, an obsession that's much less about the difficult reality of those assigned to other-gendered bodies and much more about the confused state of the rest of us.

Trans projects-no matter how well intentioned or trans-positive—are inher-

ently voyeuristic. That's a fact of the marketplace as well as of politics. The number of transpeople in America is extraordinarily difficult to estimate, but it lies somewhere between 22.000 and 700.000, which means that the trans audience is too small to constitute even a niche. All the aforementioned projects were made mostly by and for the rest of us. Perhaps that is why the new batch of trans stories, without exception, is about the period of transition. They revel in the drama of being one gender locked in the body of another and escaping, an ambiguity that confounds and thrills straight and gay people. Ray, in *About Ray*, has a straight mom and two gay grandmothers and an estranged father, and all of them are mystified by her transition. *The Danish Girl* is a very detailed portrait of the mechanics of transition. Einar Wegener begins the film happily sleeping with his charming wife. He tries on some stockings to help her paint a portrait, then attends a party as a woman on a lark, then finds that these performances simply are him-or rather her. Encouraged and supported by his wife throughout a brutal surgery, he ends the film as Lili Elbe.

The heroes of both films live out the same triumphant story: They view their transformation as an act of personal fulfillment. That's the exact opposite situation of those who are called "normal" today. What is manliness and what is womanliness now? Who knows at this point? Science doesn't even know. In 2012, data analyst Bobbi Carothers and psychology professor Harry Reis applied mathematical modeling to the question of the difference between men and women. They undertook a comprehensive study of various studies on gendered psychological indicators, and every single one led to the same conclusion. "The idea of consistently and inflexibly gendertyped individuals is [under dispute]. That is, there are not two distinct genders, but instead there are linear gradations of variables associated with sex." continued



RECENT HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE TRANSGENDER CANON

- > I Am Cait (E!, debuted 2015) [1]
- > I Am Jazz (TLC, debuted 2015): A transgender girl navigates teenage life.
- > New Girls on the Block (Discovery Life, debuted 2015): Transgender women in Kansas City, Missouri. [2
- Becoming Us (ABC Family, debuted 2015): A teenage boy chronicles his family's
- experiences since his father's transition. [3]
- > Boy Meets Girl (2015 film): A young trans woman, played by a trans actress, in Kentucky.
- "How to Be a Girl" (podcast, debuted 2014): A mother on her 7-year-old transgender daughter.
- > Transparent. (See next page.)
- > American Transgender (2012

film): A doc on the lives of three transgender people. > Prodigal Sons (2010 film): A documentary about a high-

school-jock-turned-filmmaker who now lives as a woman. Transamerica (2005 film): Felicity Huffman stars as a

trans woman who discovers she fathered a son in the past. [4]

THE FUTURE MATERIALIZES

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EXPERIMENTAL THINKING,
AND CUTTING-EDGE WOOL
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TOGETHER ANNUALLY
FOR THE INTERNATIONAL
WOOLMARK PRIZE.

The Woolmark Company, the global authority on wool, brings together menswear design talent from around the world to reimagine the possibilities of Merino wool while encouraging remarkable results as part of their annual international fashion award. Regional winners will converge during the Pitti Uomo Trade Fair in Florence, Italy, on January 13, 2016, to compete for the overall menswear prize of AU\$100,000 and to be

stocked through exclusive retail partners worldwide. First founded in 1953, the International Woolmark Prize has enabled crucial development for up-and-coming talent through its continued support, while helping propel fashion into a visionary future. The following six finalists have set the bar high for creativity and innovation, each incorporating the evolution of Merino wool into their individual signatures.

COLOR FELTING



A process of applying colored yarn directly to cloth using needles blends two materials into one.

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NEEDLE PUNCHING



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PATTERN WEAVING



Specially woven Merino wool alters the directional lines of pinstripe fabric.



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CONTINUED More than a year after that seemingly conclusive bit of research, Penn Medicine extensively studied the brain scans of 949 male and female youths and came to the opposite conclusion. "The developmental trajectories of males and females separate at a young age, demonstrating wide differences during adolescence and adulthood." So to summarize, some of the latest evidence from the best sources establishes that menand women are more or less the same but also completely and utterly different.

But the transgender community, at least as it is represented in these films and television shows, can tell the difference. They know. The Danish Girl is a saga of selffulfillment. About Ray feels at times like an advanced sex-ed class on transgender identity, but ultimately it's a family comedy. People were shocked when Caitlyn Jenner described her reservations about same-sex marriage, but transgender identity contains a very conservative idea at its core: These men and women have an essential gender, a manliness or a womanliness that transcends even the reality of their bodies. It follows that there must be a real essence to manhood and womanhood.

Trans people seem like the ultimate icons of gender fluidity, capable of literally changing from women into men or men into women, but they are the opposite. Ray craves normalcy. He wants to be normal in a man's body. The Danish Girl was the Danish Girl all along; her female nature needed only to be uncovered. That is the hope that trans people bring to the rest of us, the ones who are supposedly normal—the hope that we might be comfortable and understanding in our own bodies, too. The terrible violence against and strange adoration of transgender people spring from the same source. They must suffer for the deep sexual confusion in the world, but it's ours, not theirs. 12





Eddie Redmayne: last year Stephen Hawking, now a Danish Girl; Elle Fanning in *About Ray*.



THE *TRANSPARENT* GUIDE TO PARENTING

TOM CHIARELLA ON WHAT IS (OBVIOUSLY, NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT!) THE SHOW'S MOST IMPORTANT THEME

I watched the whole first season of Transparent (season two premieres on Amazon December 4) without giving its title a second thought. I plodded along, one episode to the next, thinking it was an expertly crafted sociology lesson about gender transition. The title had to do with seeing, I figured, with being seen at last. It seemed fairly obvious. Transparent.

Problem is, I missed the pun. Transparent. Trans-parent. This isn't so much a show about gender transitioning. Transparent is a show about parenting.

It's a show about being a father, a mother, a "moppa" named Maura and played by Jeffrey Tambor, to a troika of beautiful, insanely selfabsorbed adult offspring. About getting on with your life while you're still mothering/fatheringin this case, parenting a rich housewife whose children seem to conveniently disappear after she leaves her husband for a lesbian version of a dandy; a pansexual slacker; and something called a "record executive," a guy who persuades smooth-skinned girls to warble forgotten Top 40 covers either just before or after he tries to sleep with them.

The Pfefferman family. They pass the time by having a lot of sex, picking up their fair share of deli food, and drowsing through their somewhat predictable paths of acceptance and fear with regard to their father's emergence as Moppa. Poster children that they are for inane First World problems, the three of them are the show's real ugliness, with a keening piano sotto voce running beneath their frantic, empty worries. They want, and want, and want, buoyed by Maura's checks, the house she moved out of, the prospect of her estate, suckling at the tit of her corner of the California real-estate bubble and living in a Los Angeles caught in a luminous and sustained sunset. It looks the way Vicodin feels: easy to enjoy, impossible to like.

They are the truth of my uneasiness. These little shits. Their expectations outweigh their accomplishments. Their sense of what they are owed defines them.
They give Maura
nothing save their occasional companionship at the cosmetics
counter. They need her
more than they love her.
Children!

And for her part, Maura cannot shake herself of them. She loves them more than she needs them. At some point, for each of us, that's being a parent.

Having safely raised her kids, Maura wants something reasonable—the chance to start over—and something unreasonable, too—to be the person she hid inside herself, no matter the cost to others. She can be mean. She gets angry. She assumes the constancy of her love means she deserves freedom. Parents!

Even when Maura breaks down in her pursuit, as she does when she shows up at her exwife's doorstep after her children walk out during her hauntingly good performance in a trans talent show, she is a fairly incredible creature of her own change, defined mostly by her habits and her hopes. Like all of us. 18

THE RULES

Rule No. 643: Beware of all cocktails with names that involve death. Also: medicine. Rule No. 682: Nose ring. Mustache. Pick one.

Rule No. 701: When friends and loved ones start remarking that you "love to laugh," know that those friends and loved ones think you are very, very old. Rule No. 714: Let someone else bring the wacky. And the noise. And the dessert.

A CALM IS NOT DESIRABLE IN ANY SITUATION IN LIFE ABIGAIL ADAMS











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Things You Should Know About

A primer for cultural literacy



Will you be watching *The Ridiculous 6*, Adam Sandler's comedy about Native Americans?

- 1. Do you have Netflix?
- Yes. (+5) ○ No. (-30)
- **2.** How...
- Hello to you too,Tonto! (+20)How what? (0)
- 3. How...did you feel about Punch-Drunk Love?
- Loved it. (-15) ○ Hated it. I mean, how is it possible to make Sandler not hilarious? (+25)

MORE THAN O POINTS: You will be seeing The Ridiculous 6 (premieres on Netflix 12/11)—in which Adam Sandler plays a white man adopted by Native Americans—and all future Sandler films.

4. What about Anger Management?

- Hated it. (-8) ○ So good. Peak Nicholson. (+30)
- 5. Huh. Did you like Jack and Jill?
- ○I don't even think I've heard of that one. (-15) Oh, you've gotta see it. Sandler plays a guy and his twin sister, and Al Pacino—playing himself—falls in love with the girl twin. Classic Sandler. (+35)

6. Christ.

- Christ. (-20) ○ Sandler is dressed up like a lady. (+40)
- 7. Understood. Do you care for teen heart-throb Taylor Lautner?
- No. (-5) ○ No. (-5)
- 8. Well, he's in Adam Sandler's new movie.
- Christ. (-25)○ That kid's career is really in the crapper. (-10)

FEWER THAN O POINTS: You will not be seeing The Ridiculous 6. But you might be seeing Quentin Tarantino's The Hateful Eight (12/25) or Antoine Fuqua's The Magnificent Seven (9/23/16).

THE VAGUELY RECOGNIZABLE WOMAN

MATCH EACH WOMAN
BELOW TO HER NAME AND PROJECT









LINDA ___CARDELLINI, caught between Mark Wahlberg and Will Ferrell in Daddy's Home (12/25)

FELICITY _ JONES,

the female lead in next year's adaptation of Dan Brown thriller Inferno and Rogue One, a Star Wars story

ALICIA ___ VIKANDER, star of transgender-artist drama The Danish Girl

__ DAISY RIDLEY, actress in Star Wars: The Force Awakens (12/18)

(11/27)

ANSWER KEY: CARDELLINI, 2; JONES, 3; VIKANDER, 4; RIDLEY, 1

INTERCHANGEABLE MOVIE TAGLINE MAD LIBS

In an attempt to relive their glory days,			
beforechange their lives forever.			
e.g. , The Night Before (11/20): In an attempt to relive their glory days, three bros prepare for a last epic night of cocaine and hallucinogens before fatherhood and fame change their lives forever. (See also: Sisters, 12/18.)			
stars in			
e.g., 13 Hours: The Secret Soldiers of Benghazi (1/15/16): John Krasinski stars in Michael Bay's ripped-from-the-headlines interpretation of the 2012 attack on the American consulate in Benghazi. (See also: Snowden, 5/13/16.)			
Teams up with to tell the tale of a crew of to tell the tale of a crew of to battle and discover dark truths about threat from the natural world to tell the tale of a crew of			
e.g., In the Heart of the Sea (12/11): Ron Howard teams up with Chris Hemsworth and Cillian Murphy to tell the tale of a crew of whalers who battle a giant sperm whale and discover dark truths about the lengths men will go to to survive. (See also: The Revenant, 12/25.)			

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endary status can be seen in the annual calendar, where the month, date and day can be read off at a glance.

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Couple half bottles (around three glasses each), couple regulars, and the captain (around 12 glasses).

The Big Bottle of Joy

An endorsement of the magnum

Drinking by DAVID WONDRICH

We have always associated champagne with two emotions: delight and regret. The delight, of course, comes the moment it appears, dancing in the glass. That delight, however, turns into bitter, pinching regret the next morning, there being no hangover quite so feral as a champagne hangover.

The challenge, then, is to maximize the delight without inviting the regret. For us, the solution is the magnum. A large bottle holding 1.5 liters, or two ordinary bottles, the magnum is big enough to be impressive without edging over into mayhem. Nonetheless, produce a chilled magnum of something nice and plant it on the coffee table in front of your friends and it changes the dynamic almost as much as if you had produced the other kind of Magnum, the Dirty-Harry-do-you-feel-lucky-punk one.

(In this case, the answer is "Yes, I do.") Split two ways, it will fuel an unforgettable night (and make for a morning that is, if not out-and-out rocky, at least a little gravelly); three, it's a memorable toot; four, a fine beginning. Even split among six, it offers more than a token toast. But it's not just the number of glasses it contains that makes the magnum such an engine of delight, or even the reputation it has for producing a champagne that is, all things otherwise being equal, tastier than that from a smaller bottle. It's the promise it contains.

A single bottle of champagne goes quick, too damned quick. There may be more or there may not. Even if there's another bottle at hand, you'll wonder if they're going to open it or they'll wonder if you are. With a magnum, more isn't a plan or a contingency. It's a reality, right there in the bottle. You can drink your first glass, the one that opens the afferent pathways of the brain, secure in the knowledge that the second, the booster, will follow—and if the group is a small one, so will the third, the exhilarator, and perhaps the fourth, the one that makes your head feel like it's bobbing on a

string. We find that awareness to be almost as effective at loosening us up as the champagne itself.

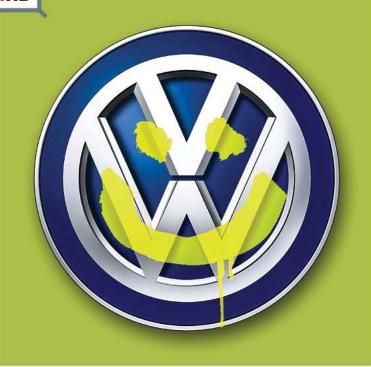
As for the champagne: If your friends are deeply geeky in the world of wines, you can pop a magnum of, say, Bruno Paillard Brut Première Cuvée or Billecart-Salmon Brut Rosé, confident that they'll be impressed. (For ordinary drinkers, though, it's safest to stick to the big, famous producers.) Part of the appeal of a magnum is the extravagance behind it; if it's going to work, people have to know that it's special. We've always been partial to Veuve Clicquot Yellow Label, but we hope we'll never be so snobby as to turn down a glass or three of Moët or Mumm or Perrier-Jouët or their ilk. You don't break out a magnum of champagne to celebrate connoisseurship. You do it to celebrate the joy that comes from having friends to walk beside you on your crooked path through this world.

AND IT TASTES BETTER, TOO It's a piece of champagne orthodoxy that the stuff tastes better from a magnum. And it ages better. Experts attribute that to proportionately less surface area being exposed to oxygen. We can say, having tried a magnum of Veuve Clicquot Brut (\$130), that it is rounder, fruitier, and fuller

than a regular bottle, which is brighter and more floral. Together, the two bottles hold 18 glasses of champagne. We're not going to try that again.

ANYWHERE ANYTHIS. WITH CONFIDENCE AND STYLE ANYWHERE ANYTHIS. WITHANYONE.





The Apology Multiple

What VW should have learned from GM **The Portfolio by KEN KURSON**

On two days in September, General Motors and Volkswagen upended the order of the global auto industry. GM closed a shameful chapter in its history, drawing praise from the Department of Justice for its "exemplary actions." Considering the incident started with a dangerous defect that led to years of concealment and more than 100 deaths, that was remarkable praise. The next day, the EPA accused VW of rigging software in 500,000 "clean diesel" cars to

accused VW of rigging software in 500,000 "clean diesel" cars to cheat emissions tests. Within four days, the company acknowledged the cheating—involving 11 million cars worldwide and dating back to 2009. Investors knocked one third off the company's market cap in two days. The anger quickly spread to a global mob of prosecutors, politicians, car owners, and regulators.

The contrast between the companies' approaches teaches two important lessons. First, even though big-company apologies are common, some companies haven't gotten the message. Volkswagen made matters worse with its botched initial response. General Motors, under CEO Mary Barra, has created a new template for how to rebound from illegal, deceptive conduct. In fact, GM has put itself in a position to become a direct beneficiary of VW's loss of consumer trust. Second, investors and consumers are capable of forgiving almost anything. Volkswagen will likely survive this potentially fatal self-inflicted wound, but only after it applies the necessary elements of a big-company apology.

So far, it's not looking good. CEO Martin Winterkorn denied personal knowledge, said the company was sorry, and resigned. The company set aside \$7.3 billion to cover recalls and other costs. Investors clearly thought this was too little. VW, four weeks into the crisis, offered no additional information to the market other than calling Credit Suisse's estimated worst-case cost of \$87 billion "nonsense."

The company continued to express its belief that only a few employees at VW's Wolfsburg, Germany, headquarters knew of the deception. The initial apology under oath before Congress came from Michael Horn, CEO of Volkswagen Group of America, not from incoming CEO of the parent company, Matthias Müller. Horn noted that three unnamed employees had been suspended, but otherwise expressed his own shock that this had happened.

Based on Volkswagen's underwhelming initial response, no one felt reluctant about piling on. News outlets calculated the maximum EPA fine per vehicle (\$37,500) and reported that VW could end up having to pay \$18 billion in the U.S. alone. An *Irish Times* article suggested the scandal "has the potential to unhinge the German economic model," with a cost "more than what Germany would ever have faced from a Greek exit from the euro zone." A commentary in *Fortune* said the problem could "become as big as the 2007/2008 financial crisis."

If anyone noticed what had happened to General Motors on September 17 (the day before the Volkswagen story broke), they quickly forgot it. The U.S.

Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York announced that it had filed criminal charges against GM and also announced a deferred prosecution agreement under which GM admitted it had failed to disclose a defective ignition switch in two million cars to regulators and had misled consumers about the defect. In addition, the company paid the government \$900 million and agreed to independent safety monitoring.

This was a huge win for GM. When Mary Barra took over as CEO in January 2014, she knew she was inheriting a company that had weathered a humiliating bailout and bankruptcy. Then she learned that the company had sold two million cars with a faulty ignition that occasionally disabled the deployment of air bags. GM had been contesting lawsuits from survivors and families of victims for years. In fact, the company was aware the ignition switch was faulty, could have corrected the flaw for \$1 per car, and hid the problem to avoid hurting sales of used models.

Despite all this, the U.S. Attorney took the unusual step of complimenting General Motors for its "exemplary actions to demonstrate acceptance and acknowledgment of its responsibility for its conduct." How did Barra pull off turning criminal conduct into a demonstration of quality leadership?

First, GM hired high-profile former prosecutor Anton Valukas to conduct an investigation that was thorough, fast, and shared with the government. One reason companies have trouble making effective apologies is that they fear losing control of the process. Barra recognized that GM had already put its fate in the hands of regulators, politicians, and courts. Bringing CONTINUED



CONTINUED

in a prominent outsider actually gave the company a modicum of control.

Second, the company acknowledged what it was apologizing for. VW's apology to Congress admitted nothing. Naturally, the first instinct is always to admit nothing, for fear of giving ammunition to regulators and plaintiffs' lawyers. GM turned this on its head: Its behavior during the years of deception was a sunk cost. The company could demonstrate proper behavior only prospectively.

Third, heads rolled. General Motors dismissed 15 employees by June 2014, including some senior engineers and a high-level in-house lawyer.

Fourth, GM put its money where its mouth was. The company largely stopped fighting victims in court. It set up a \$600 million compensation fund. Most plaintiffs and potential plaintiffs have opted to settle—through the fund and another mass \$575 million settlement—rather than continue with litigation. The total cost to GM (recalls, the settlement funds, the government payment) has been about \$5.5 billion, but the crisis is nearly resolved.

Investors have rewarded General Motors with a robust "apology multiple." Its stock traded in a narrow range for most of 2014 and 2015. Most of the bad news from the recalls, apologies, and payments was blunted by compliments that the company was being forthright and responsible. In the 15 months before Volkswagen's environmental cheating became public, GM actually outperformed VW in the stock market.

Volkswagen should have learned. Now it faces a grave, possibly existential threat. But the company is still in the driver's seat. It can handle this poorly and face the prospect of massive sanctions worldwide and a decade of litigation over an issuehow people "feel" about the car they drive and the environmental promises it made—that will be hard to price. But it could also handle this boldly—apologize for real and take decisive remedial steps before being forced to do so. If so, its severely depressed stock price will be an excellent buy. The thing about this particular scandal is that as angry as drivers are right now about the deception, there is little doubt that if VW suddenly offered a \$2,500 discount on every new model, that anger would evaporate. 12



The a

The aspiring master sommeliers of Esquire Network's Uncorked (Tuesdays, 10:00 P.M.). Shazam this photo to see a preview of the show.

HOW TO TALK ABOUT WINE WITHOUT SOUNDING LIKE A SNOB

Morgan Harris knows wine. He is, after all, a sommelier at Aureole, a Michelin-starred restaurant in New York City. But Harris also knows that there's a fine line between talking knowledgeably about wine and sounding like a dick. Of course, no good sommelier would ever dream of calling out a customer. So, with his help, we'll do it for him.

-JULIA BLACK

DON'T SAY:	BECAUSE	SO SAY THIS INSTEAD:
"I DON'T LIKE DRY RED WINE."	You do. Most quality reds top out at five grams of sugar per liter—well under the ten-gram cap for dry wines—so unless you're talking dessert wine or Manischewitz, dry is what you're drinking.	"I'd like a Beaujolais or a pinot noir." Both wines have a lower level of tannin, which can cause cotton mouth.
"I'M GETTING NOTES OF FRESHLY CUT LAWN- MOWER CLIPPINGS."	That's the most pretentious way to describe the taste of methoxypyrazine, a chemical compound that manifests in cabernet sauvignon and sauvignon blanc as bright, fresh, herbal flavors.	Do you like the wine? "I taste lemongrass/mint/ tarragon." Oh, you don't like the wine? "Green bell pepper/jalapeño." Sure, even grass! But come on with the lawn-mower clippings.
"GIVE ME A WINE I CAN REALLY CHEW ON."	Wine is a liquid. You're talking about the viscosity, which increases in proportion to the alcohol-towater ratio. Think about it like milk: Skim, 2 percent, and whole have totally different textures.	"I'd like a full-bodied wine."
"YOU CAN REALLY TASTE THE LIMESTONE MINERALITY."	You can't. Although grapes grown in similar types of soil share certain charac- teristics, it's not possible to make out the taste of spe- cific minerals in wine.	"This reminds me of another burgundy."
"THIS WINE IS SO YOUTHFUL/PRETTY/FUN."	It's a wine, not a woman.	"This wine is delicious" will work just fine.





MODERN AHEAD OF ITS TIME

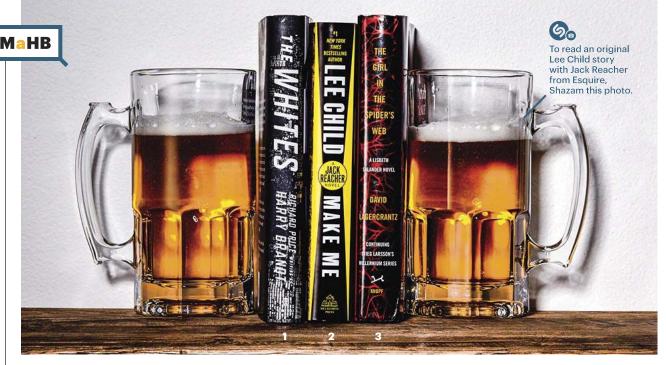


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Let's Go Places



The Boilermakers

Catching up on three of the best detective novels of 2015 **By BENJAMIN PERCY**

Nobody is better at taping off crime scenes and chalk-lining bodies than Richard Price. Forget that he wrote [1] The Whites under the pen name Harry Brandt-this is the same mix of rat-a-tat dialogue and gritty vision and chess-game plotting that informs his masterful novels Lush Life and Clockers. Pure Price, pure gold. The Whites are the criminals who walk away untouched by justice, who haunt detectives even after they retire their gold shield. Back in the '90s, Billy Graves was a hot-shit member of an anticrime unit called the Wild Geese until he was disgraced by a high-profile shooting. These days he's a bent-backed father of two stuck with a lousy assignment on the Night Watch. But the discovery of a body—one of his old unit's Whites-puts him at the center of a labyrinth of trouble. Every character in this novel seems to have a dark secret that will threaten Graves's marriage, his job, his friendships, his family. This isn't just one of the best crime novels of the year-it's one of the best books.

There's something wonderfully oldfashioned about Lee Child's [2] Make Me. It opens like a classic western: A train cuts across the plains and comes to a screeching halt in a nowhere town. A tall, mysterious stranger steps onto the platform and brings justice to a lawless territory. This is Jack Reacher-Child's famous continuing-series character-and the town is Mother's Rest, Oklahoma. No one seems to know where the town got its name from, maybe because they can't get cell service and Wikipedia it. Reacher allies with an enticing private detective whose partner has been killed and buried in a hog pen. The two of them race from Mother's Rest to L. A. to Chicago to Phoenix to a topsecret Internet hub. Reacher doesn't own a smartphone, doesn't even have a driver's license, which makes him feel like not only someone out of another world (the archetypal knight or cowboy) but also the perfect foil to the deep Web, the Internet below the Internet-a.k.a. the cyberhell of this book and our world.

Writers like Child pit themselves staunchly against this lawless digital tsunami, but others, like Price and Stieg Larsson, arm their heroes with its tools. Larsson died before his wildly popular The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo came out, but the publisher chose wisely in tapping David Lagercrantz to continue the series with [3] The Girl in the Spider's Web. Not only do the matter-of-fact style and intricate plotting and sexy, chilling atmosphere feel very true to the original novels, but Lagercrantz transcends the source material. He's the better writer. He worked as a crime reporter and knows our journalist protagonist, Mikael Blomkvist, and Sweden's troubles well. In this version: A brilliant scientist is murdered. Corporate and government Web sites are compromised. Cybercriminals lurk in the sordid corners of the night and the Internet. And a severely autistic savant might hold the key to a mystery. It's a dark, thrilling novel that channels our very real digital vulnerabilities as people, businesses, and nations. 12

PLUS: A BOXING BOOK FOR A COLD WINTER NIGHT

Brin-Jonathan Butler spent much of the past decade shadowing Cuba's Olympic boxing champions: Teófilo Stevenson and Félix Savón. men who could have easily shared the ring with Tyson

and Ali. Butler roamed Cuba's streets and gyms, exploring the country's raw carnality and beauty. When he pushed Stevenson on why he'd turned down \$5 million to fight Ali, his

answer was the same as in 1976: "What is one million dollars compared to the love of eight million Cubans?" The Domino Diaries helps you understand that choice. - ALESZU BAJAK



@FURSTY, OSLO | Tucked away in the Norwegian fjords, I spent my cold and quiet mornings by the water reading *The Martian* on my Kindle Paperwhite. The otherworldly landscape made each page feel as if I were on another planet.

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kindle



Sex with Stacey Woods

Sex with my girlfriend is great, but the noises she makes really take me out of the moment. Should I just suck it up?

Yes, the squealing, the bleating...it all gets rather grating after a while, doesn't it?

Typically, ball gags are inappropriate, unless they're not, in which case get a ball gag; problem solved. Otherwise, it might be worth it to inquire about the motivation behind these noises. The 2011 study "Evidence to Suggest that Copulatory Vocalizations in Women Are Not a Reflexive Consequence of Orgasm" (which, if you haven't seen onstage, you really should) concluded that some Female Copulatory Vocalizations, as they're called, are in fact put on for your benefit. "They might also make the noises unconsciously at other times," says Gayle Brewer, coauthor of the study, "but certainly women do it for a particular reason," such as to reassure you, boost your ego, or let you know that you "can actually just go ahead and finish." That last one's not really for your benefit, but if indeed she thinks she's doing it for you, tell her she couldn't be more off. Tell her you had to write to

HAIR-LOSS COPING STRATEGIES THAT WON'T AFFECT YOUR ERECTION

Plugs

Baseball cap

Yarmulke (Jews only)

Horsehair wig (barristers only)

Beanie (lovable rascals only)

Camauro (popes only)

Acceptance

a magazine, and that it became several people's job to put an end to it. However, should it be revealed that her noises (and do call them her "noises") are genuine expressions of pleasure that somehow just ruin it for you, and she never warms to the ball-gagidea, you need to break up with her or start tuning her out. I guarantee that the noises she makes will only increase in frequency and volume, growing to cover a wide range of activities less agreeable than sex.

I want to try a hair-loss treatment. but I heard it could make me impotent. Is that true?

We all know the joy of running your hand through a thick head of hair after a good wank, but it's recently been discovered that finasteride, a hair-loss drug, can cause persistent neurological, physical, and sexual side effects, including impotence, in about 15 percent of men who use it. This is not a high number-more men become impotent each year just from reading this column-but post-finasteride syndrome, or "post-Propecia syndrome," as Dr. Joseph P. Alukal, director of male reproductive health at New York University School of Medicine, calls it, may not be reversible. There are some men, he explains, who "don't immediately get better" after discontinuing the drug, and some, he says with what sounds like a shudder, who "get worse." Therefore, you have a decision to make. As a person of deep shallowness, I'd veer toward hair-if vou're living anything close to a decent life, more people see your hair than your dick-but I'm reluctant to rule in favor of either, since I find both outcomes equally depressing. There is, I've heard, a pill for impotence. I don't know if you can take both simultaneously-I've only mixed them once, and I was on a lot of other drugs at the time—but maybe alternating handfuls every morning would eventually even things out.

I'm not really supposed to spell the alphabet with my tongue when I go down on my lady, am I?

The alphabet technique is for those who don't feel confident going off-book. If that's you, don't restrict yourself to the Latin alphabet, which is now considered boring and racist. Chinese characters, though impressive, can get a bit messy, but Cyrillic, with its sturdy right angles, can be a riveting alternative, as can Arabic, when you need something really fluid. Really, the only alphabet I'd avoid down there is shorthand.

Got a sex question of your own? E-mail it to us at sex@esquire.com



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THE ESQUIRE MANUAL

No. 19: Receiving Gifts

This month, the underexamined half of the gifting dynamic, including wanted gifts, unwanted gifts, and saying thanks in the age of Snapchat



It is widely heralded that giving is the act that brings the truest joy during this, its namesake season. That is a lie (imagine giving someone something you want; imagine that soul-warming glow of jubilation swelling in your chest and cheeks as you watch that person receive it with such obvious gratitude and excitement; imagine yourself three days later, when they have it and you do not—you would rather be the other guy, be honest, even if only for right now; no one can hear your thoughts, Mr. Lama). Giving's only glint of hope for superiority resides in the far deeper complexities contained in the act of receiving, in which the responsibility to maintain cheer and the spotlight alike falls on the recipient.

Yet the art of receiving remains rooted in a need that is dead simple: You must convince them you like it. You must convince them when you are truly overwhelmed with happiness. (That is easy.) You must convince them when you are tired. You must convince them when it is obvious to you, to them, to everyone around them that they put no effort into it. You must convince them when your disappointment in their fifth annual misunderstanding of who you are (as in, not a man who needs two bread machines, no matter the latest, greatest number of crust settings) darkens your appreciation of their effort to try to still know. You must convince them you like it when you aren't sure what that crayon drawing is of. You must convince them when they give you nothing.

You must convince them you like it because whatever they did, they are there, and since they are there, you must offer them happiness. It is your duty and your delight. You see, each reception is actually an act of giving. One in which you still get to keep whatever is in your hands.

WHEN TO

It is perfectly acceptable to regift if the giver doesn't live in your home. If the gift cannot be displayed in your home. If the gift can be displayed in your home but could feasibly have "fallen off the shelf" or "gone missing" or become prey to "that darn dog-what a rascal he can be, eh? So how are you?" If its giver will not visit the home of the person you'd regift it to, or will not hear its new recipient sing its (or your) praises. If someone else in your home can give it to somebody, thus (perhaps) increasing the separation between you and the new recipient. If your name is not written on it. If it's not "one of a kind" or "homemade" or "what your grandfather wanted." And if it's not food.

VISUAL RULE



VISUAL RULE: MYSTERY



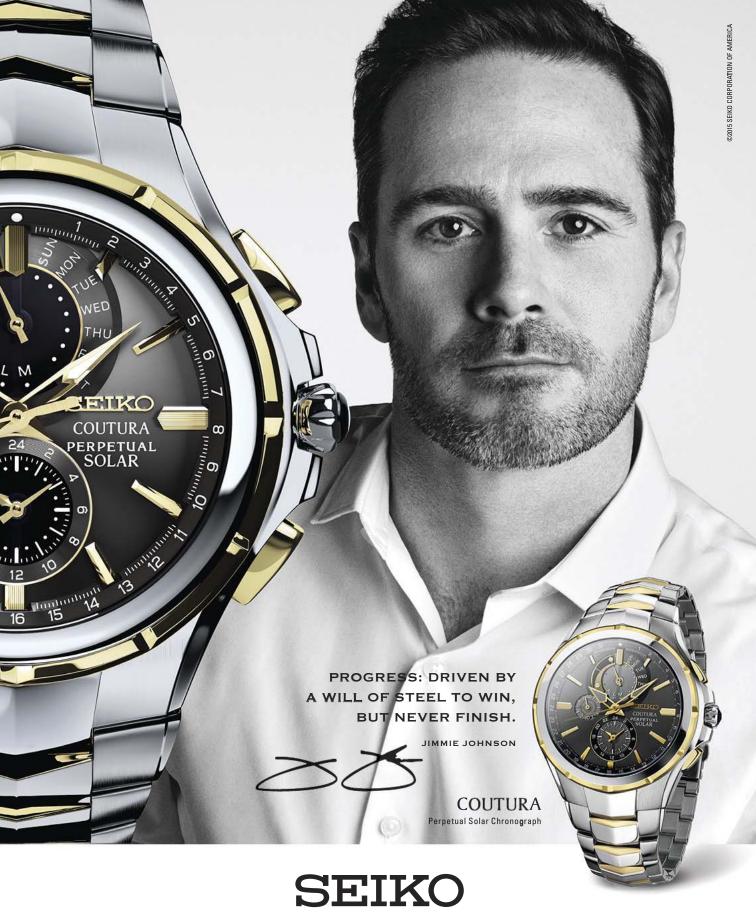
ALWAYS



SOMETIMES



NEVER



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THE CHELSEA

DEC 31, 2015

Award-winning recording artist and critically acclaimed performer Bruno Mars will make a triumphant return to The Chelsea at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas for an unforgettable New Year's Eve performance.



ROSE.RABBIT.LIE.

DEC 30, 2015, JAN 1 & 2, 2016

Scott Bradlee's Postmodern Jukebox performs at Rose. Rabbit. Lie. inside The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas. A rebirth of the social club, Rose. Rabbit. Lie. is a modern twist on clubs of the night – a truly communal venue that blurs the lines between restaurant, bar, nightclub and live entertainment to create a modern supper club.



WEST END PENTHOUSES

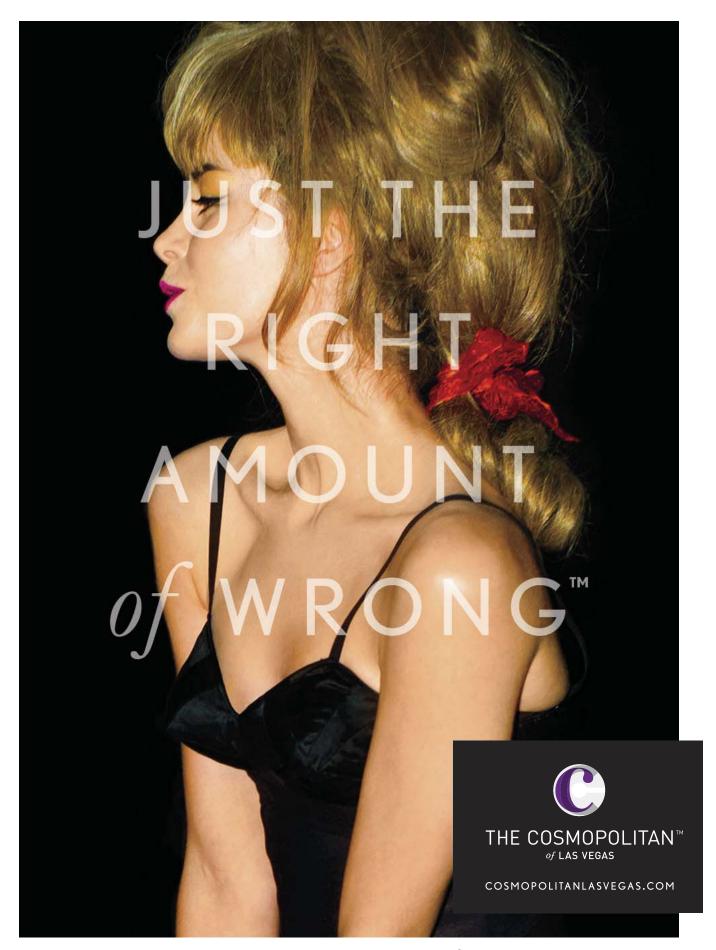
The pinnacle of exclusivity, the West End Penthouses at The Cosmopolitan will truly change your vision of luxury living. Rising high above Las Vegas, these custom designed suites each provide a one-of-a-kind experience through whimsical touches like crystal-encrusted wall textures, an unexpected art collection, and rich, tailor-made fabrics.



VESPER BAR

Vesper Bar is a haven of modern sophistication with firm roots in the elegance of the past. Featuring a rotating menu of signature cocktails based on long-forgotten recipes, it is the place to go for the perfect drink mixed with style and grace.





THE ESQUIRE MANUAL

Should You Return It?

If you answer "no" to any of these four questions, then no.

- Do you need the store-credit equivalent of the gift's value?
- Do vou feel comfortable telling the person that you returned their gift?
- And telling them what, exactly, the better alternative that you are exchanging it for is?
- Does the value of the alternative outweigh the thought they put in?



Regarding the Modern Thank-You-Note Dilemma

A reminder, in a time when messages have lost some of their meaning

In a distant epoch not even ten years ago, if one received a gift in the mail, he felt as if he had time. In many cases, he had days-weeks!-before the giver felt curious: Why haven't I heard? Or Why haven't I been thanked? Alas, we live in the age of instant gratitude—thanks to our myriad messaging systems (text, voice, video, self-destructing video) and the rise of package tracking, which lets the user know the exact minute the box arrived and their beneficiary's thanklessness began. This age coincides with another: that of not knowing everyone's address. Between the two, a mailed note might, sure, be illogical. But the twilight of a product doesn't excuse the end of caring. So go sit alone. Write down why you're thankful, how you're going to use the gift, why you needed it more than they knew (even if it's not wholly true). Write about when you saw them last, that you've been thinking about that time recently. Take a picture with the gift. Suggest a time to share it with them soon. And only then hit send.

HOW TO FAKE A SMILE

As demonstrated—for one last time, everybody—by Josh Stamberg of *The Affair* (Showtime, Sundays, 10:00 P.M.), which will actually make you happy



EXHIBIT A: The Natural Reaction Which says: "This is...something."



orce-Up/Half-Wince Which says: "You should not have."



EXHIBIT C: The Head-Tilt Compensation Which says: "Look! I'm adorable with my head tilted!"

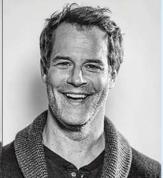


EXHIBIT D: The Authentic Fake Which says: "Wow. This is really great."

SQUINT. Two main muscles form an authentic-looking smile. The zygomaticus major pulls up the ends of the lips. Everyone can do that. The trick is to try to control the orbicularis oculi, which raises the cheeks and creates crow's-feet around the eyes in a real smile. Squinting mimics that. WIDER. A really wide smile can lead to crow's-feet without the orbicularis oculi. SYMMETRICALLY. In a genuine smile, the lips top off at the same height. OR MANU-FACTURE JOY. Use one of three methods: Think about something else, like a good memory with the person. Or focus on the gift, what you do like about it—its color, shape. Or, if especially concerned, smile beforehand for a minute, which science shows will make you feel real happiness. The action can create the emotion.

With thanks to: Mark G. Frank, chair of the department of communication at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York; Peter Jensen, co-artistic director at T. Schreiber Studio for Film & Theatre, New York; Bob Krakower, acting coach, New York.





THE BEST

COATS IF YOU GET

FEATURING MARC KUSHNER

THE MAN: The architect who is defining and developing the future of buildings with his firm, HWKN; Web site, Architizer.com; and book, The Future of Architecture in 100 Buildings. For a conversation with him, head to esquire. com/marc-kushner.

THE CLOTHES: In winter, clothes need to work or you'll freeze (not a great look). But a good coat is not just about heat. This one, from pufferwear-master Moncler and classics reinventer AMI, is as warm as, well, not *quite* hell and looks damn, uh, cool. It elevates as it shelters. As do our ten favorites that follow, each in its own way.

PHOTOGRAPH BY AARON RICHTER

Cashmere turtleneck (\$360) by AMI Alexandre Mattiussi.





It is all you need. It's handsome enough to serve over a suit yet short enough for dressing down. Its tightly knit wool insulates and breathes. And the color is restrained yet alive—the blue both blends into and stands apart from the sea of navy and black coats that so many other, less vital people rely on.

1. Double-breasted wool coat (\$1,395) by Luigi Bianchi Mantova. 2. Three-button wool jacket (\$925) by L.B.M. 1911. 3. Cashmere turtleneck (\$80) by Uniqlo. 4. Wool flannel trousers (\$170) by Club Monaco. 5. Suede boots (\$695) by Aquatalia. 6. Cashmere scarf (\$680) by Brunello Cucinelli. 7. Leather gloves (\$125) by Coach.



No. 02

THE ONE MADE (MOSTLY) OUTDOORS

If it's good enough for the sheep, it's good enough for you. All winter long, the suckers stand outside in blustery, snowy fieldswithout first stopping for something at Starbucks!-so the leather has been very much usertested, again and again and again. And this one here is decidedly thermal, as it's sourced from the United Kingdom, where leather is particularly thick. Shearling jacket (\$1,200) by Banana Republic.



No. 03

THE ONE FOR THE **MATURE YOUNG MAN**

If it's good enough for Paddington, it's good enough for you. It was also good enough for the British Royal Navy in both World Wars and all the students who wore one in the years that followed. And it still carries with it those youthful overtones. This version, thankfully, has toggle fasteners made of actual wood (not plastic). Wool-blend duffle coat (\$425) by Tommy Hilfiger.

A METEOROLOGICAL GUIDE TO SNOW BOOTS

Some of us look a little strange wearing knee-highs while braving a full two inches of powder. Below, the top boots for snowfalls of increasing depth.



Leather-and-rubber boots (\$99) by L.L. Bean.

Leather-and-rubber boots (\$170) by Sorel. Rubber boots (\$215) by **Hunter Original.**

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BULOVA.COM





It's J. Crew's warmest ever, reinforced with down and armyinspired. Coated-cotton-anddown-blend parka (\$450) by J. Crew; cotton shirt (\$175) and cotton henley (\$95) by Alex Mill; cotton jeans (\$275) by Baldwin; leather boots (\$328) by Cole Haan.



No. 05

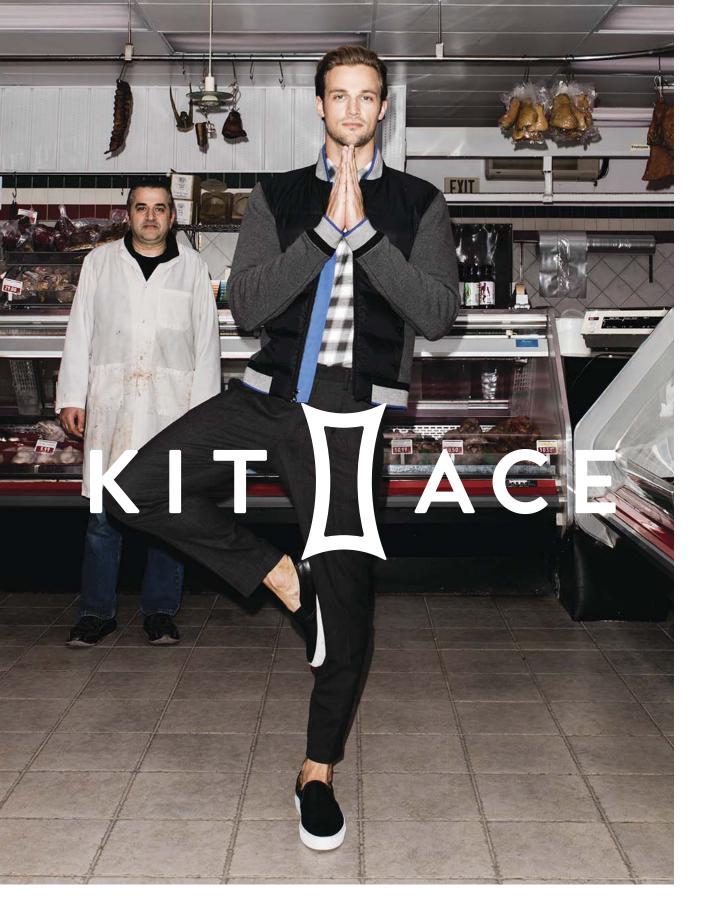
THE EXPLORER'S PARKA

We took it to the North Pole. Yes, there, where everything else is south. And we felt like we were still indoors. This is, after all, "the warmest jacket on earth," according to Canada Goose. The thing has been tested at minus-94 degrees—just over 40 degrees shy of the coldest temperature ever recorded on earth (at least according to one satellite reading): minus-135.8 degrees, in 2010. Which, when you're equipped with high-caliber down, a coyote-fur hood, and some all-over fleece lining, doesn't sound so bad. *Polyester-cotton-and-down parka* (\$1,275) by Canada Goose.



Meet Your New Luxury Ski Jacket

FOR THEIR DEBUT SKI COLLECTION, THE MAESTROS AT STEFANO RICCI BLENDED HIGH-QUALITY ITALIAN CRAFTS-MANSHIP (APPLIED FOR DECADES TO THE MANY FACETS OF MEN'S WEAR) WITH THE HIGH TECH REQUIRED BY ONE REALM THEY HAD YET TO CONQUER: THE SLOPES.





No. 06

MODERN CLASSIC

A proclamation from the man who knows what he wants: Build it double-breasted for extra warmth and refinement. Cuff the sleeves for the same effect. Cut it midway down the thigh to keep it contemporary. Point the patch pockets straight up (so that hands can reach straight in) and make them large (so that those hands can fit all the way in if need be). Yeah, that's it. Thanks.

1. Double-breasted wool-andcashmere coat (\$1,500) by Lardini. 2. Two-button polyester-blend suit (\$265) by Perry Ellis. 3. Cotton shirt (\$95) by Michael Kors. 4. Silk tie (\$230) by Brioni. 5. Leather shoes (\$195) by Jack Erwin. 6. Cashmere-and-silk scarf (\$360) by Corneliani. 7. Leather gloves (\$495) by Ermenegildo Zegna.

THE BEST TRANSITION SOCKS

Socks you can wear with boots while commuting and then with wing tips while working.



Not too thin. Not too thick. By Stance (\$12).



No. 07

THE ONE WITH THE SCIENCE

People see the thermometer and they forget about the other elements. An utterly still cold? Not so bad. A windy cold? Bad. A windy, wet cold? Misery. But this wool—developed by the geniuses at Loro Piana-is treated with a specially designed thin membrane that wicks sweat outward while blocking everything else. It will keep you as dry and shielded from the wind as possible. Wool-and-down parka (\$1,495) by Woolrich.



No. 08

THE SUBSTITUTE BLAZER

We get it: You hate redundancy. One doesn't layer two oxford shirts or two scarves, or wear mittens over gloves (which actually might be a good idea, now that you mention it), so why wear a sport coat only to put another button-down, lapeled layer on top of it? Well, you don't have to if you feel that strongly about it. Put this on. Go. Be free. Wooland-cashmere coat (\$1,000) by Joseph Abboud.







No. 010

AND, OF COURSE, THE STANDARD-BEARER

Sometimes all you need is something clean, reliable, and timeless. Look no further. Double-breasted wool-blend peacoat (\$398) by Bonobos; cotton sweater (\$80) by Nautica; cotton shirt (\$99) by Gant Diamond G; cotton jeans (\$178) by AG; leather boots (\$180) by Timberland; scarf (\$30) by Gap.

Ask Nick Sullivan

by Clarks. 6. Wool-and-cash-

mere hat (\$69) by Lands' End.

OUR FASHION DIRECTOR WILL NOW TAKE YOUR QUESTIONS

I am going to a blacktie destination wedding. What's the etiquette on wearing a black suit instead of a tux?

ADDRESS WITHHELD

▶ It depends on whether you're a stickler for the rules. Etiquette says that a black suit, a white shirt, and a black tie do not constitute black tie. But that doesn't

bother half of the red-carpet fraternity. I think it's cutting corners. Although I don't own a black suit, if I did I'd wear it only if the dress code was "cocktail attire." But everyone these days has to draw their own line in the sand.

I'd like to wear my rooster belt buckle. I've been told not to. Who is right? NAME AND ADDRESS WITHHELD

▶ Do you live in the Southwest? I read somewhere that, 'round there, rooster buckles are worn by Mexican drug traffickers who care to adorn themselves with symbols of their trade-in this case, marijuana (perhaps the tail is reminiscent of the leaf). A parrot suggests cocaine (for somewhat obvious chitchat reasons), and a goat, inexplicably, represents heroin. Could this be what your friends are driving at? If so, you may want to take their advice. Unless you live in Maine.



Why is it a rule that you should never button the bottom button on a suit iacket? @STAYCHAD

▶ The jacket's ideal fit is based on the slimmest part, which corresponds to the button that sits on your navel. Buttoning only the one also allows the jacket to move freely, meaning it's a rule that creates freedom.

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*Class is Full-Size Pickups under 8,500 lbs. GVWR with available 3.5L EcoBoost® V6, 4x2. **Class is Full-Size Pickups under 8,500 lbs. GVWR with available 5.0 V8, 4x2. [EPA-estimated rating of 19 city/26 hwy/22 combined mpg, available 2.7L EcoBoost V6, 4x2. Actual mileage will vary. Class is Full-Size Pickups under 8,500 lbs. GVWR. "I Government 5-Star Safety Ratings are part of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's New Car Assessment Program at www.safetcar.gov."

Try to avoid water higher than the bottom of the hubs and proceed slowly. Refer to your owner's manual for detailed information regarding driving through water.





TO WHAT'S NEXT. GOOSEISLAND.COM

SLAH?



MOST IMPROVED: JOE FLACCO

The Baltimore Ravens' quarterback looked like a gopher—and it worked. In 2013, while at peak head fuzz, he was the MVP of the National Football League's Super Bowl. And now he can place that trophy right next to his Grooming Award. Because in the past few years, Flacco has grown into a man with fantastic hair, both when it's askew (see right) and when it's combed (see farther right). As for the football—well, it's a team sport.

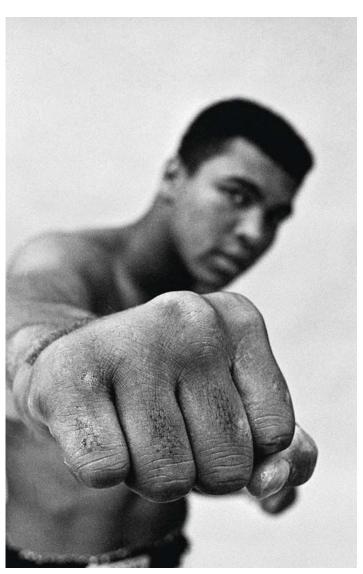




After

Before

Rodney Cutler is an Ironman triathlete and the owner of Cutler salons in New York City.





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PROMOTION

5 STANDOUT GFTS for the HOLIDAYS



EJ SAMSON ESQUIRE'S SOCIAL STYLE CORRESPONDENT @ejsamson

The key to surviving the season is to have a gifting game plan. Make this the year you spend less time shopping—and more time actually enjoying the holidays—by making a list ahead of time. And do yourself a favor by including these top picks.

FOR THE LUXURY LOVER

From expert advice and how-to instruction to trusted recommendations, no gift is more stylish than the Big Black Book by the editors of Esquire. Give it to the guy who prefers to stay fashionably informed.

BBBGIFT.ESQUIRE.COM



FOR THE MINIMALIST

The Movado Sapphire features a flat sapphire crystal that flows to the edge of the round, bezel-free case, creating a smooth, seamless, fluid surface. It's the ideal gift for the guy who desires stunning simplicity. (\$1,895)

MOVADO.COM



FOR THE RISK-TAKER

John Varvatos Dark Rebel channels the primal, visceral spirit that stirs in all of us and awakens the senses to all we cannot see. Inspired by a risk-taking rebellious attitude, the intoxicating fragrance is distinct and pure edge. It is the perfect gift for the tough and totally uninhibited. (4.2 oz. \$86)

MACYS.COM



FOR THE GENTLEMAN

From the day he opened up shop in 1942, Don Julio González was a man who was passionate about quality and authenticity. Give the gift of his legacy to someone who savors life's finer things this holiday season.

DONJULIO.COM



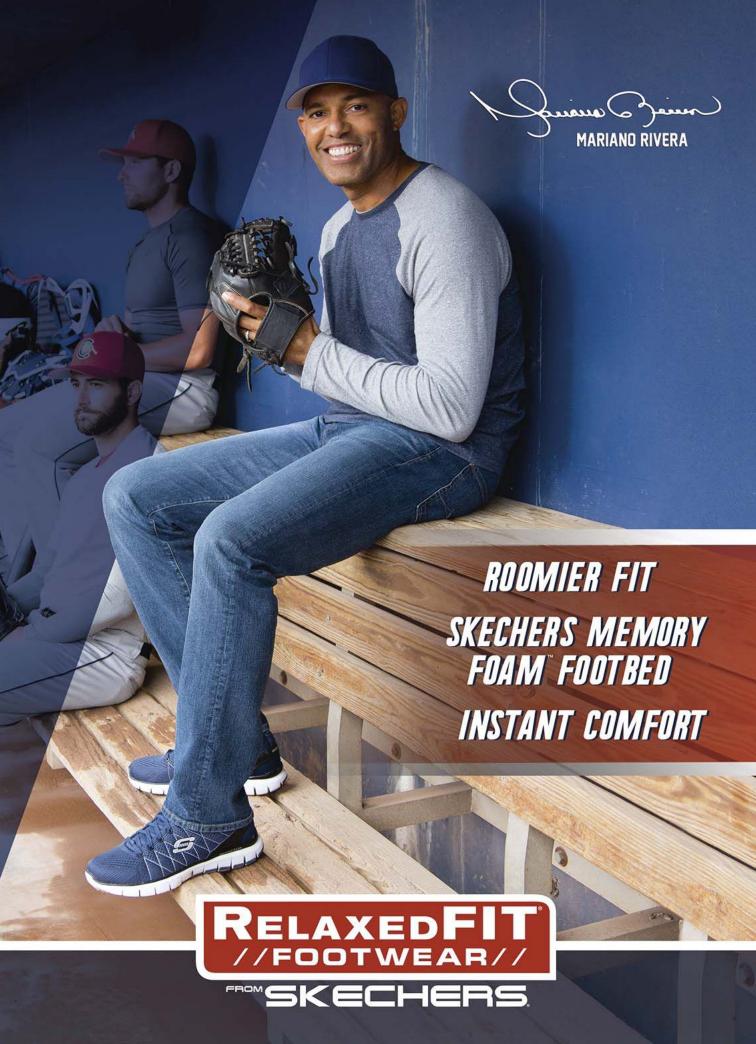


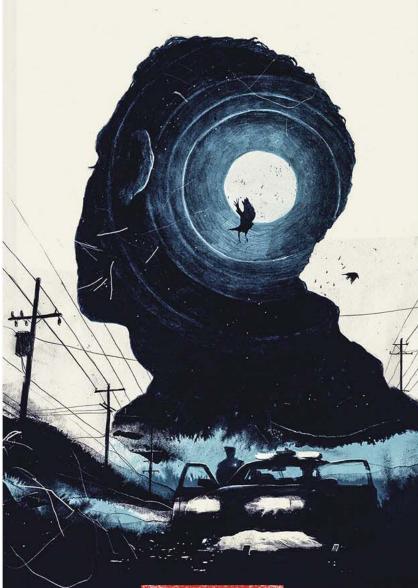
FOR THE FASHION-FORWARD FAN

From tailgating to the final drive and beyond, this Tommy Bahama NFL®-licensed full-zip jacket offers warmth and comfort. The variety of all 32 team logos ensures you can choose the right team for every football fan on your list. (\$188)

ТОММУВАНАМА.СОМ







ESQUIRE · FICTION

CAN YOU EVER ESCAPE THE BAD THINGS YOU'VE DONE?



Shazam this illustration to read another Jess Walter short story on Esquire Classic.

HE COULD NEVER SETTLE on one place to part his hair.

He pronounced the *p* in the word *receipt*. He always stared at her expectantly, as if waiting for her to say something profound.

He didn't have a car and yet he hummed nervously while she drove. He didn't drive at all. "You're humming again," she'd say and he'd look up from the passenger seat, genuinely surprised. "Was I?"

He licked his fork like a lollipop after eating pie.

He'd once killed two people.

IT WASN'T THAT HE HAD terrible taste in music, but his sense of it had screeched to a halt sometime around 1982. "You know. there has been some new music recorded since Steely Dan," she used to tease him.

Reading the paper over breakfast every morning he scrunched his eyes behind his black reading glasses, which made him look old.

He was too old anyway, forty-six-sixteen years older than Lisa. He kept himself in great shape, though, jogging five miles and doing two hundred sit-ups and pushups every day. He'd developed this regimen during the two years he spent in prison for vehicular homicide. "Maybe I need to go to prison," she said one day. He didn't say anything and she felt terrible for making such an awful joke. Her own sense of humor was often inappropriate.

He wore his pants a little too high.

He had a son by his first marriage. Nate was twenty, and in college, and while Kyle said he would have more kids if Lisa wanted them, she suspected he really didn't want more children. Kyle talked to his son twice a week on the phone, but it was like a conversation between acquaintances. "How's











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ESQUIRE FICTION

school...that's good...you staying busy?" Lisa always made pro/ con lists about the men she dated but she honestly couldn't decide whether his being a father was a pro or a con. Eventually, she put it on the con side.

He frequently told Lisa that he loved her, but he always said it sadly, with quiet resignation. In fact, he spoke with such grim passivity about their relationship that she began to wonder if it depressed him. Sure, they could move in together if she wanted to; yes, he would get married if she wanted to; okay, he would have more kids if she wanted to. "What do you want?" she asked once. "I want to wake up every morning and see you there," he said. Who wouldn't fall in love with someone who said things like that?

He was a security guard in the building where she worked, a job well beneath his education and intelligence. He'd gone to Cornell and to law school at the University of Washington, then spent six

years in the Seattle Public Defender's office, rising in the ranks until what he called "the accident" derailed his career. Now he sat at a desk, checked people in and out, and signed for sandwiches and UPS deliveries. Because he was a felon, he had to get what was called a certificate of rehabilitation, and there were certain things he wasn't allowed to do: handle money or carry firearms. The job bored him silly. Lisa used to say things like "I hope you're keeping us secure, Kyle." He'd just smile.

He spoke in vague generalities about the accident-with that same dire fatalism he talked about everything, as if his life were already over and he was simply describing the details

after the fact. Lisa worked as a writer for a Seattle tech journal and was a language person. She wondered if it was Kyle's fatalism that bothered her or the platitudes he used to express it: "That ship sailed a long time ago" and "You can't live yesterday."

He popped his jaw sometimes.

He managed to somehow be both too tight-lipped and too forthcoming about the accident. For instance, he often told people about it too soon, the minute he met them. On their very first date $\,$ (after flirting with the cute security guard for almost a year she'd finally asked him out) Kyle told her, "You should know that I was in prison. Eight years ago I got drunk and lost control of my car. I drove up on a sidewalk. There was a young couple on a date and I hit them and they died." He did the same thing when he met her parents: "Mr. Allen, you should know I spent two years in prison." Yet he rarely offered any details beyond this basic description, either about the accident or about prison. He'd say, "You get a different sense of how time passes" or "You learn to stop trying to rewind," sentences that were like easing a door closed on the subject. Since she was a journalist, it was easy enough for Lisa to research it herself; she read the court filings, the divorce papers, the civil suit, the bankruptcy reports. These provided details (he'd had a blood alcohol level more than twice the legal limit; he had swerved to miss another drunk driver, then lost control of the car; he was sentenced to four years in prison but served a little more than two; the nineteen-year-old man on the sidewalk had died right away; the girl, who was only seventeen,

had lingered in a coma for a week). But in the end, these documents offered very little insight into what must have been the most wrenching time of his life.

He was a snorer.

THE HAPPIER THE OCCASION, the sadder he could seem. She made the mistake of taking him to her company's New Year's Eve party and he stood off alone, sipping apple cider, staring at his shoes. They went to her nephew's birthday party and he sat by himself, wary, as if expecting trouble.

He didn't drink anymore but when someone offered him a drink, he took it and held it until he could find a time to pour it in the sink.

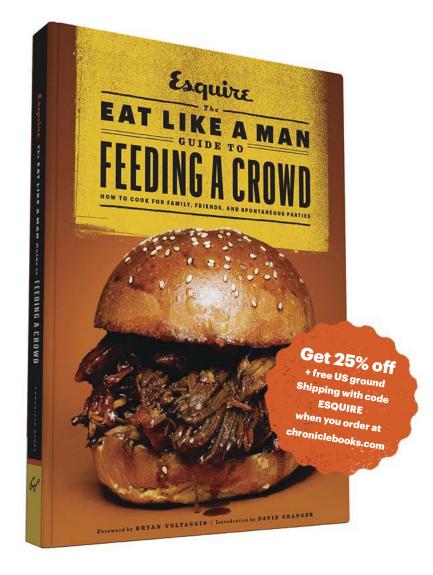
He could suddenly seem bereft. Ten minutes before their wedding she found him standing outside, looking at the horizon, and assumed he was in one of those moods. He turned. He wore a sim-

66 I WANT YOU TO REMEMBER HOW YOU RUINED THE LIVES **OF THESE PEOPLE.**

ple black suit and had cut his bushy salt-and-pepper hair as short as she'd ever seen it. In this moment he was terrifyingly handsome to her, and she had a flash of fear, almost despair. Had she fallen in love with one of those men who would one day snap and simply disappear? Would she find out that he frequented prostitutes and had four aliases? "Contemplating your escape?" she asked. He said, "No, of course not." Then he looked at her, up and down, and up and down again. She was wearing a simple sheath wedding dress, off-white, no veil. It was as if he hadn't seen her in a decade. He said, in the saddest voice: "My God, you're beautiful, Lisa." They got married at her parents' country club in Spokane. She could tell he was glad not to be getting married in Seattle, even if it meant the only people at the wedding would be Lisa's family and friends. His father was too sick to travel and Kyle hadn't even invited his two brothers and their families. "Too much stress," he said. He invited his son, but Nate had finals that week. "No, I understand completely," Kyle said on the phone. "No, I think you should definitely stay and study ... No, it's fine." Lisa's brother Alex was Kyle's best man and her nephews were his groomsmen. The whole wedding party was hers; he was like another guest. For their honeymoon, Lisa's parents got them a suite at the Coeur d'Alene Hotel, on the eighteenth floor, with a hot tub and a huge bay window overlooking the massive, beautiful lake. Lisa woke in the middle of the night and saw Kyle standing at the window in his underwear, staring out. She opened her mouth to ask if he was okay, but then she had a realization: If they were going to

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NO ONE GETS AWAY CLEAN

PREMIERES NOV 14 10 9



ESQUIRE FICTION

spend the next thirty years together she might have to get used to this sad husband of hers staring out windows.

He had absolutely no sense of design. When she moved into his little house in the Wallingford neighborhood of Seattle, she had to start from scratch, piece by piece, getting rid of his crappy furniture, buying drapes, getting new rugs.

One day a card arrived addressed to Kyle. No return address. Assuming it was another wedding card, Lisa opened it. It was a rambling, hate-filled letter from the father of the girl Kyle had killed with his car. "I hope you're happy with your pretty new

wife, you heartless asshole. I hope you're happy knowing that Shae-Lynn can never get married. I hope one day you have kids and some drunk fuckhead runs them over with a car..." It went on and on like this. When he got home from work she gave it to him. "Ben Willard," he said. "He sends me a note like that a couple of times a year. I should've warned you." She asked how Ben had heard about the wedding. "I think he Googles my name every once in a while." He read the card, exhaled deeply. He had a drawer in his nightstand where he kept all of the cards and letters from Ben Willard and he carefully put it in there, like a priest putting away communion wafers, like he'd finished some ritual of penance. Then he went out to rake leaves.

He wasn't a great sleeper. When she felt him tossing and turning or sitting up in bed, she learned not to say What are you thinking about or What's wrong, because these questions always got the same answer: Nothing. One night, she asked, instead, "Why do you love me, Kyle?" Without hesitation he said, "Your boobs," and they both laughed until they were teary.

That fall, another letter came from Shae-Lynn's father. This one was less angry than the first one, more plaintive. "Do you know

what her favorite food was? It was banana pancakes. Don't you dare eat a pancake ever again, murderer. Will you at least do that for me? Never eat another pancake?"

He never ate pancakes after that.

When they found out she was pregnant, he wept. She wanted to ask if they were tears of joy or of sadness but she knew it was a stupid question. They were both and they were neither and they were nothing and they were everything.

He wanted no input on the baby's name. "Oh, God, I can't," he said. "Please, you just pick." She chose to name the baby Elizabeth, after her mother.

She had to talk him into taking the promotion at work: assistant director of security for the whole building. It was more money and an improvement in his hours. But he only took the promotion because it allowed her to drop down to three days a week at her job.

Over the next year two more cards arrived from Ben Willard;

thankfully, neither one seemed connected to their having a baby. Either Ben didn't know about the baby or he chose not to include Elizabeth in his invective-filled letters. One of the cards began, "Today would have been Shae-Lynn's twenty-eighth birthday. I just wanted to remind you of all the birthdays she doesn't get to have. I wanted to remind you that we're out here. My wife and me, our two sons, nieces and nephews she never got to meet, Shae's grandparents, all of her cousins and friends, I wanted you to remember how you ruined the lives of these people. And I wanted you to imagine the same number of people on Andrew's side, whose

> lives your thoughtless selfish stupid behavior affected, you arrogant horrible prick, you worthless sack of shit, you..." She gave Kyle the card and he read it slowly and quietly, a deep furrow in his brow. Then he carefully put it in the drawer with the others.

If it weren't for her, he'd never buy new clothes. Their favorite thing was to put Elizabeth in her stroller and walk around their neighborhood at dusk, grab a slice of pizza or some Thai food. One day she noticed his sneakers had holes in the soles. "How long have you had those?" she asked. He thought about it and said, "Fifteen years?"

Poignancy sometimes caused him physical pain. Once Nate came over to introduce his new girlfriend to Kyle and Lisa. Her name was Alayna and she was four years older than him, a beautiful girl who was getting her master's in psychology at the college Nate was endlessly attending (he was a chronic major-changer). They'd been set up on a date by a mutual friend and had spent almost every night together since then. It was clear they were crazy about each other. Seeing the tall, thin, easygoing Nate made Lisa wistful, as if she were looking through a time machine to

see what Kyle must have looked like when he was unburdened by such deep sorrow—those same downturned eyes seeming somehow hopeful. When he introduced Alayna to one-year-old Elizabeth, Nate said, "And this is my baby sister." It was so sweet, but Kyle looked like he'd been shot in the stomach; his shoulders caved in. "You're going to have to let life back in sometime," she said to him in bed that night. "I know," he said. "I'm trying."

He was overprotective as a father. After Elizabeth was first born he got up two or three times a night to put his hand on the baby's back and make sure she was breathing. He checked the labels of the baby food they gave her, of all the clothes they put on her. She asked him: "Kyle, do you really think, in 2015, that someone is going to still be selling flammable baby wear?" This didn't stop him from checking.

One day, when Elizabeth was just learning to walk, Lisa was at work and Kyle was home alone with the baby and she fell into the



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corner of the coffee table. She got a cut above her eye. Kyle was inconsolable on the phone. "I just turned away for a second!" he said. "It's fine," Lisa kept saying. "It's fine."

She wouldn't say he had a great sense of humor, but his taciturn nature made the funny things he said seem hilarious. Every few months, when his tossing and turning kept her awake, she'd say, "Why do you love me?" and his instant, deadpan answers always made her laugh. "Your access to power." "Because Ruth Bader Ginsburg won't return my calls." "Who are you again?"

He gradually thawed a little during those first four years of marriage; she would catch him smiling, relaxing, allowing himself to enjoy life a little, and yet, no matter how nice things were in their lives—and they were pretty nice—she worried that some part of him could never trust his own happiness.

The letters from Ben Willard continued to arrive, every six months or so. Sometimes a year would pass and Lisa would think he'd finally quit, but another one would come: "Dear murderer. I saw something that made me think of you. A picture of my dead daughter."

As time went on, he stopped exercising so much and a little band of fat emerged around his waist. He called it his Championship Belt.

WHEN HE WAS DIAGNOSED with prostate cancer, it was almost as if he were relieved, as if he'd been waiting for this for years. The calm on his face as they got the test results somehow made Lisa furious. "The good news," his oncologist said, "is that we caught it early, and it appears to be treatable." Lisa glanced over at him. He had that same sad look on his face and she irrationally blamed him for wanting this, for wanting to be punished for what he'd done. "Cheer up," she told him, "maybe it will metastasize." The doctor looked at her as if she were the worst person on the planet.

He was humming in the car again while Lisa drove. Elizabeth was in kindergarten and they were driving from the doctor's office together to pick her up. "I'm sorry I said that," Lisa said. He reached over and squeezed her arm. "Just promise me you'll fight this," Lisa said. He just stared out his window.

During dinner that night he kept staring at Lisa and Elizabeth, as if he were memorizing their features.

He sometimes ate too fast.

He had trouble making the decision: surgery or radiation. The doctor said he could expect "a positive outcome" with either treatment. The fact that surgery was an option was good; it meant the cancer was small and isolated to the prostate, and the chance of getting the whole tumor was better with surgery. However, there was a slight chance of dying during the procedure, and the recovery was long, and there was a possibility of damage to other parts of his body. With radiation the patient usually had fewer side effects but there was a slightly higher chance of recurrence. "It's really whichever option you are more comfortable with," the doctor said.

That night, in bed, when neither of them could sleep, she asked him again, "Why do you love me?" Without hesitation, he said, "Because you brought me back to life."

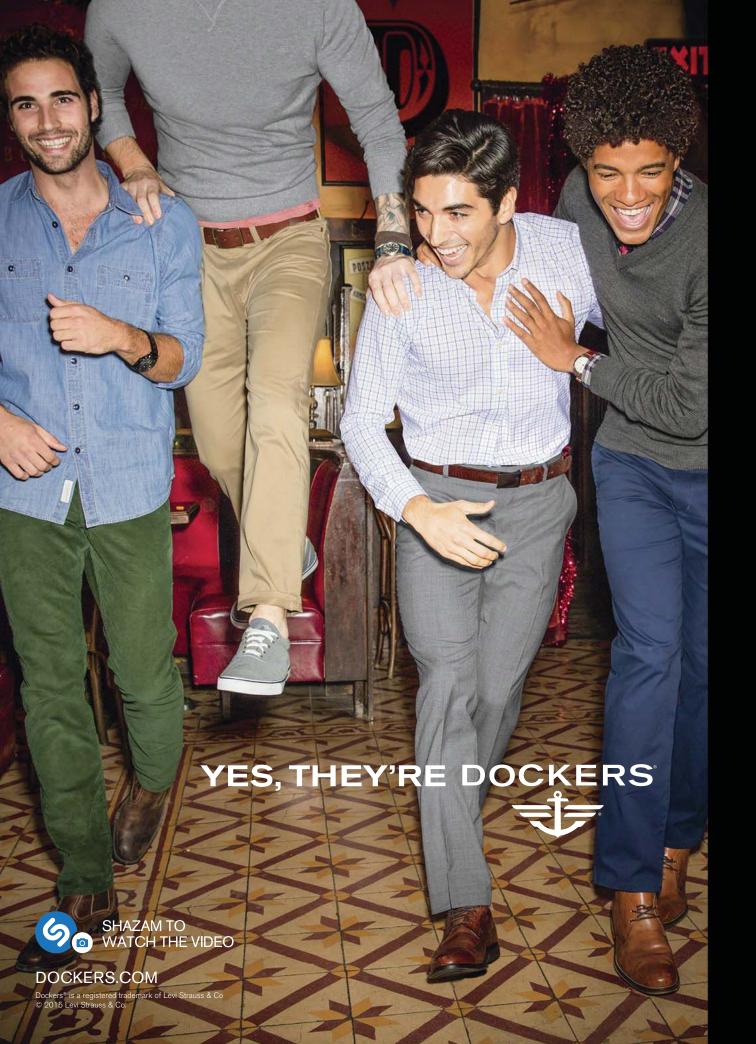
Two days before his surgery, he said he wanted to talk about what would happen if he died. Lisa tried to change the subject

but he was insistent. He went over the details of his life-insurance policy at work, and his retirement plan, about using it to pay off the house, about the social-security payments she would receive, about the small college fund he'd started for Elizabeth. Lisa listened quietly. "Is that it?" she asked when he was done. "I guess so," he said.

Neither of them could sleep. "I feel like I need to tell you what happened that day," he said. She didn't need to ask which day. "I was drinking so much then," he said. "Every day at lunch and after work. I had a bottle in my desk, in my car. Joanie and I were struggling and I was having an affair with one of the other lawyers in our office. I was a mess. I had just come off this big case. A seventeen-year-old kid choked his uncle to death. This kid was trouble, a couple of convictions for drugs and assault, but he was also developmentally disabled. Fetal alcohol syndrome, no parents around, raised by this shit-show of an aunt and uncle, had the intelligence of a third-grader. The uncle was a drunk who beat the kid. I got the prosecutor to agree to a preliminary plea bargain: He'd be tried as a minor for second-degree murder. But then the kid did the stupidest thing. A TV reporter went to the jail and interviewed him and he said he'd killed the uncle for money. The uncle was a Vietnam vet and there was all this anger about the story: a veteran strangled to death by his drug-addicted nephew for twenty-six bucks. So the prosecutor withdrew the offer and decided to go for first-degree murder, try the kid as an adult. That kind of stuff happened all the time in the PD's office... I felt sometimes like I was barely holding back this big wall of black waterlike there weren't enough fingers to plug all the holes. That night I told my wife I had to work late. But I went to see the other woman. We used to have the angriest sex. Real us-against-the-world stuff. We were both shit-faced and we got into an argument. Was I ever going to leave Joanie? No, I said. Not until Nate was in college. She threw me out of her apartment. I didn't want to go home so I went to a bar and had a few more drinks. Jesus, I used to feel so sorry for myself. Unhappy marriage, tough job... I really thought I had it bad. That's what I can't believe now, that I felt sorry for myself." He shook his head. "The bartender testified later that he tried to talk me out of driving. And he probably did. Honestly, it's all like a swirling cloud and then I'm being handcuffed in a police car...staring at the back of this cop's head. 'What happened?' I just kept asking him, 'What happened?' but he wouldn't say a word to me. 'What happened, what happened?' Finally he looked at me in the rearview mirror and said, 'Buddy, you fucked the whole world."

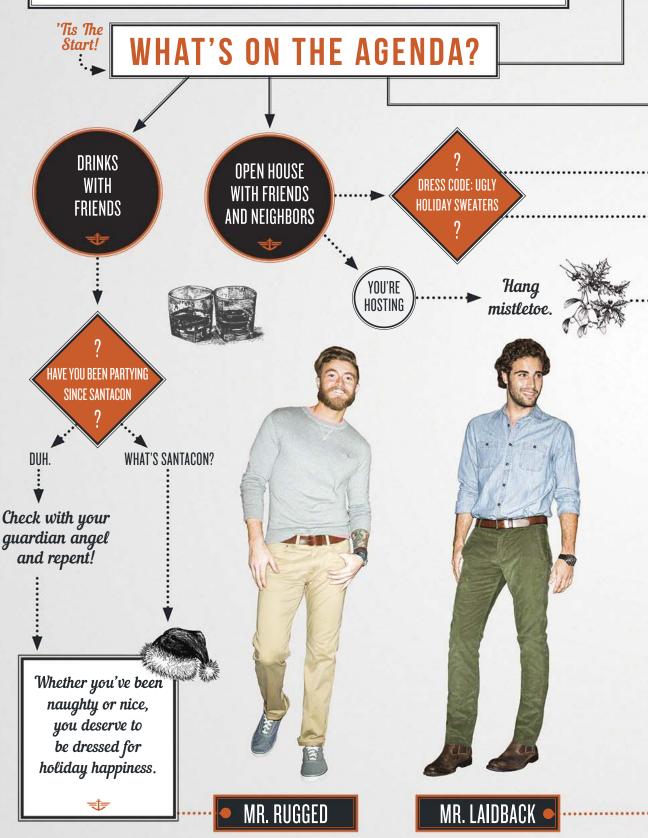
He looked so small in that hospital bed. She wondered why he had told her that story; it was almost as if he wanted her to know that if he died, he somehow deserved it.

While he was in recovery from surgery she went home to shower. There was another letter from Ben Willard. The timing appeared to be a coincidence but it felt like such a bad omen that Lisa felt a chill go through her as she tore open the envelope. "Fall is the hardest time for my family and me," Ben Willard wrote. "I start thinking about Halloween. When Shae-Lynn was seven, eight, and nine she dressed for Halloween as a cheerleader. She loved cheerleaders. But she was never very coordinated (she got that from me, I hate to say) and when she was a freshman in high



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school she tried out to be a cheerleader and didn't make it. At the time it was the most painful thing, my little girl getting rejected that way. Now, of course, I know what real pain is, and it's not having cheerleaders reject you. All I can hope is that you've felt something like the heartbreak you caused in me, you unrepentant murderer." This particular letter became angrier and angrier and it was the second-to-last line that finally did it for Lisa: "Every day I pick up the newspaper I pray that I will see your obituary, you callous son-of-a-bitch killer."

It was easy finding Ben's address. As a reporter, of course, she could find anyone, and the fact that she had never really

WE FLOAT ACROSS LIFE

ON SEAS OF ANGUISH. WE CAN CHOOSE TO GAZE UP AT THE SKY, BUT ONCE YOU KNOW

WHAT LIES BENEATH, YOU WILL

ALWAYS KNOW.

been curious about Ben Willard and his family struck her as strange as she drove through the suburbs northeast of Seattle. The Willards lived in a small, tan-colored house with a nice yard. In front there was a rock-garden island with a Japanese maple tree, just like Kyle had planted in front of their house.

On the drive over she tried out versions of the conversation. He has tried to live a good life and Can't you try forgiving him and Look, we have a child of our own and Is this how your daughter would want you to live...but none of these seemed even close to what she wanted to say, which was, simply: Please...please... please. Let us be.

It was the clearest day, almost painfully clear, sunlight glinting off car windows and causing her eyes to ache.

Ben's house had a huge picture window in front. The curtains were open. Standing on the porch Lisa could see into the living room. It was a lovely rancher, all blond wood and natural light, nicer certainly than the house she shared with Kyle. There was an upright piano against one wall. There were photos above a mantel—pictures of what must have been their two sons and their families, their pretty wives and round-faced babies. But what drew Lisa's eye was the senior picture of Shae-Lynn in the middle of the mantel, Shae-Lynn who would never grow older than that picture, Shae-Lynn who would never have her own family to be photographed with. The picture had one of those fuzzy dappled backgrounds that photographers sometimes used.

Lisa stared at the photo with a creeping sense of discomfort and disbelief.

Shae-Lynn looked exactly like her.

It wasn't just brown hair and brown eyes and round cheeks...it wasn't just the collection of features, there was something in the photograph that made Lisa feel like she was looking *at herself* twenty years ago, or at her own daughter twelve years from now.

The way Kyle used to stare at her before they started dating, what, seven years ago—she'd always assumed that slightly lost look in his eyes was about attraction. But it must have been like seeing a ghost. It must have been overwhelming. And when she started talking to him, flirting with him, what had he thought? For a moment she wondered if he really loved her at all, or if his devotion was just part of his deep desire for forgiveness. Lisa

had always believed that her role was to be a kind of antidote to what haunted Kyle, to be *outside* the central tragedy of his life, outside *what he had done*. But standing on this porch, leaning over the railing to see into the big picture window of the Willards' lovely little house, she saw finally that love and sorrow were like bays on the same sea, that there could be no existence outside this thing for Kyle.

He had killed this girl. *He killed her.* From that moment on, everything in his life had to be about this. For him and for Ben Willard.

And for her, too, now.

She stumbled off the porch, her hand over her mouth, breath coming fast and painful. And she had a horrible thought: what if Ben Willard saw her, this thirty-seven-year-old version of his

daughter, more than twice that poor girl's age when she died. Lisa staggered into the street and a car honked at her, but the car kept moving. She shook as she climbed into her car, shook starting it, and shook covering her face with her hand as another car came down the street. The car kept going. She didn't know that she'd ever cried harder in her life.

Kyle lay snoring in his hospital bed. When had his hair gone more gray than black? She'd cried herself out on the drive, and now, watching him, she simply felt tired.

The oncologist said he thought they'd gotten all of the cancer; there was no reason to think he wouldn't make a full recovery. "There might be some side effects, of course," he said, and he began to list them: slight incontinence, possible erectile dysfunction. After so much sadness, Lisa startled herself by laughing. "When we started dating I used to make pro/con lists about him. I might have to add those things to my con list."

Kyle's oncologist clearly thought she was the worst person in the world.

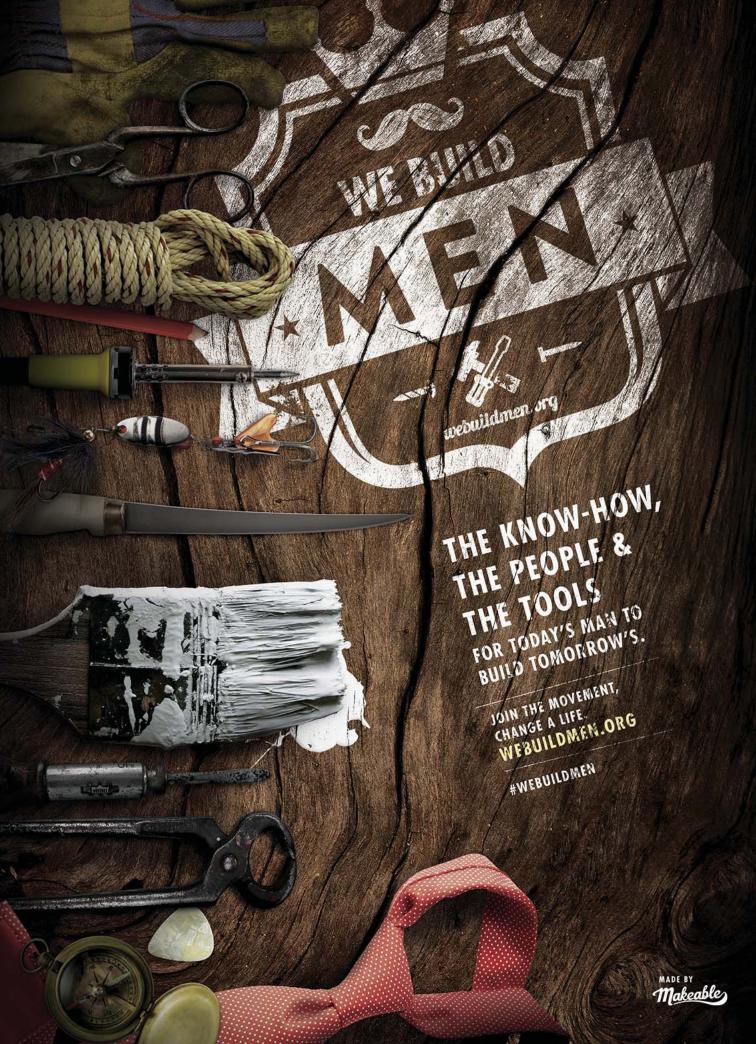
We float across life on seas of anguish. We can choose to gaze up at the sky, at the sun, the possibilities of life—but once you know what lies beneath, you will always know.

He was sitting up in bed when Lisa showed up with Elizabeth. His hair was parted in two places. She didn't even know that was possible. A nurse was going over his medications. "There they are," Kyle said, "the two prettiest girls in the world." He stared at her expectantly.

He had once killed two people.

He was a terribly good man.

"Are you ready to go home?" she asked him. 12

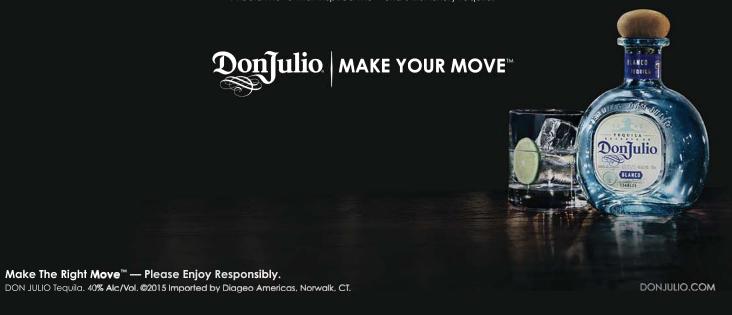


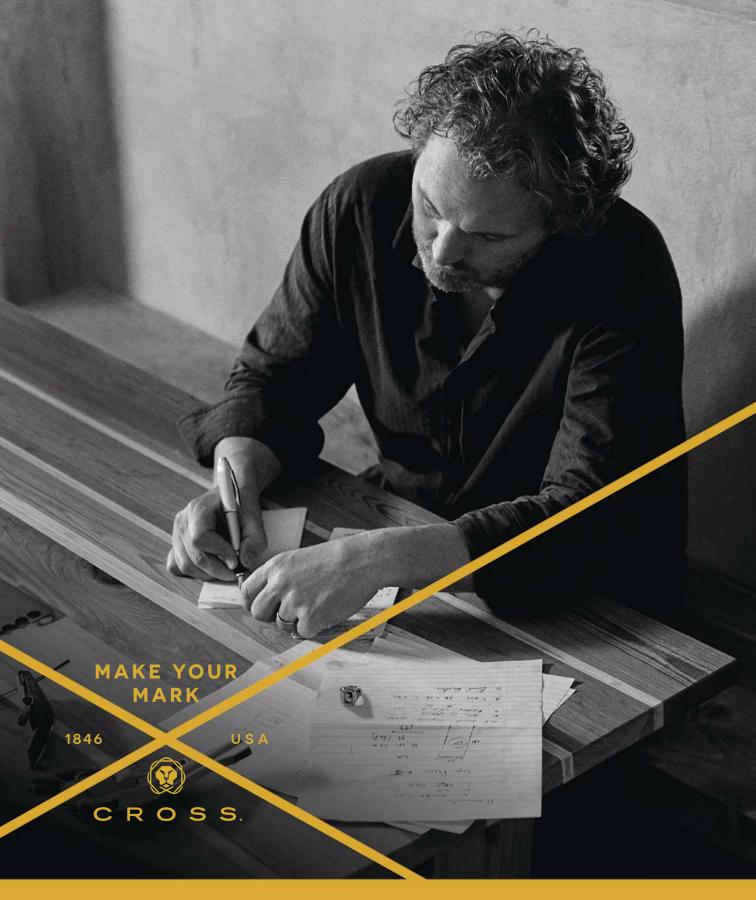




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SAM GOLD, TONY-AWARD-WINNING DIRECTOR

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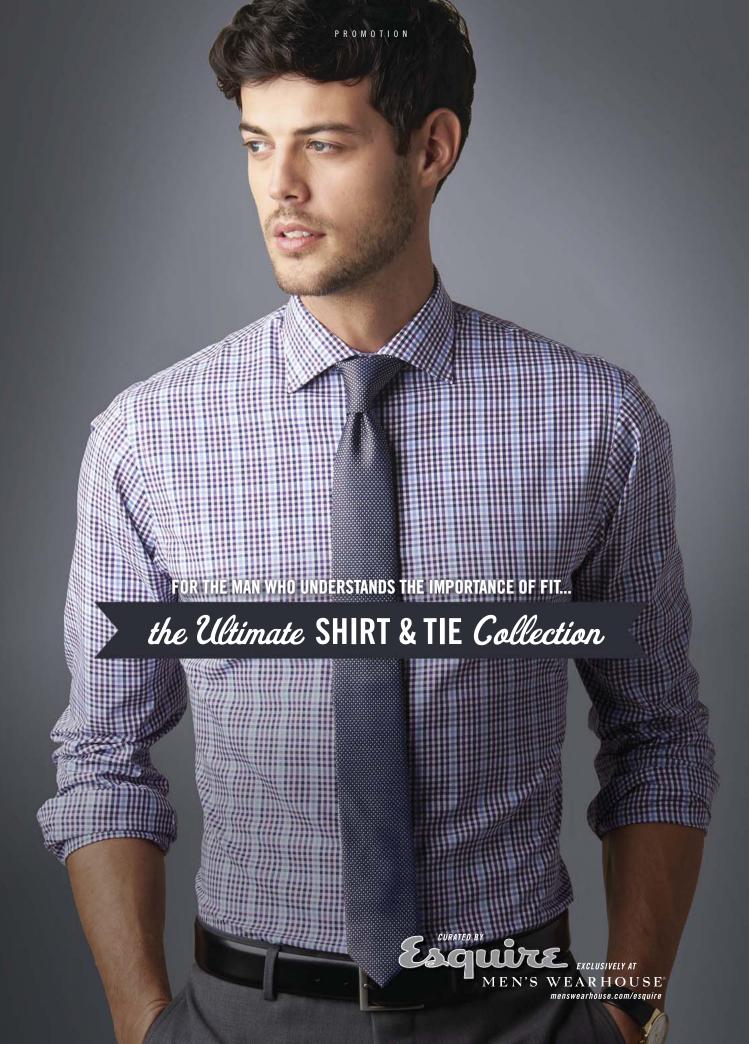


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DARE GREATLY





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It folds up to the size of a book and is impervious to slips and turbulence and relocation (what with its brilliant peg system), as well as to that damn computer player who always wins whenever we play him on our phone. By Ten Thousand Villages (\$30).



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"MY DAD'S

BEST GIFTS WERE THOSE HE

MADE BY HAND."

Watching him in his workshop, I learned the value of making something with your own hands. I handcrafted the first vintage of this California Cabernet Sauvignon to enjoy with my family and closest friends. I named it Josh Cellars after my dad, and it was my handmade gift to him. I hope you'll share a bottle of Josh with those you love this holiday season.

-Joseph Carr, Son & Napa Valley Vintner







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get better, the backyard
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friends as late as you want.
Check out our adventure list
for some ideas on how to
get out after you clock out.

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2 HOUSTON

Get your tires muddy on the trails at Xtreme Off-Road Park, 30 minutes from downtown Houston—and hit the beach after.

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Take a long or short board, hike down the bluff trail, and ride the nevercrowded beach break at Beacons, 40 minutes north of San Diego.

6 DENVER

Get some thin air driving to 13,000 feet to check out the view over the Continental Divide via the Argentine Pass Trail, a rowdy 10-mile climb starting an hour outside Denver.

CHARLOTTE

Find your jam in the water-whitewater rafting or kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding, or flatwater kayakingat the U.S. National Whitewater Center.

8 SEATTLE/TACOMA

Continue your quest for the perfect turn at Crystal Mountain, Washington's biggest ski resort, with more than 2,600 skiable acres, less than two hours from downtown Seattle.

9 SALT LAKE CITY

Step up your wheeling on one of more than a dozen 4x4 trails winding around the alpine terrain of American Fork Canyon, less than an hour from downtown Salt Lake City.

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Find out what rock crawling is all about on the 800 acres of granite boulders and obstacles that earned Katemcy Rocks the nickname the "Moab of Texas."





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Disclaimer: The Toyota Tacoma is designed to meet most off-road driving requirements, but off-roading is inherently dangerous. Abusive use may result in bodily harm or vehicle damage. Toyota encourages responsible operation to help protect you, your vehicle, and the environment. Seatbelts should be worn at all times.











THE LADY KILLERS

Our counterparts at ELLE and a few of their stylish pals—share can't-live-without items guaranteed to impress the women you love

1. OAKLEY CAVEATS

(\$160; oakley.com)

"These aviators are amazing. I wear them with everything and everywhere—after a workout, out with my sister in L.A."
—Lindsey Vonn, Olympic skier

2. CUERO & MOR TOTE L MODEL 2

(\$475; cueroandmor.com)

"Talk about a workhorse. This trendproof, sleek, sophisticated bag works day in and day out—and it even fits my gym clothes." —Jade Frampton, ELLE senior market editor

3. GLOSSIER MASK DUO SET

(\$38; glossier.com)

"A set of twelve single-serving pods of two best-selling face masks—perfect if you're into masking and long baths, which I totally am."—Emily Weiss, founder of beauty site Into the Gloss

4. NORMA KAMALI OLIVE OIL

(\$58; thewellnesscafe.com)

"There's no end to the applications for this, from the foodie/fashion icon. Plus, its majestic flask upgrades my whole kitchen."—Megan O'Neill, ELLE beauty and fitness editor

5. PIAMITA LOUNGEWEAR

(\$600 for set;

bergdorfgoodman.com)

"Silky pj's are perfect for hanging out at the house with casual guests, but I also love to break up the set and wear the pieces out."—Maria Dueñas Jacobs, ELLE accessories director

6. CHILE CRUNCH

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"The most magical condiment on the planet. It's just hot enough, garlicky but not overwhelming, and, yes, it crunches. I order it by the case." —Rachel Baker, ELLE senior features editor

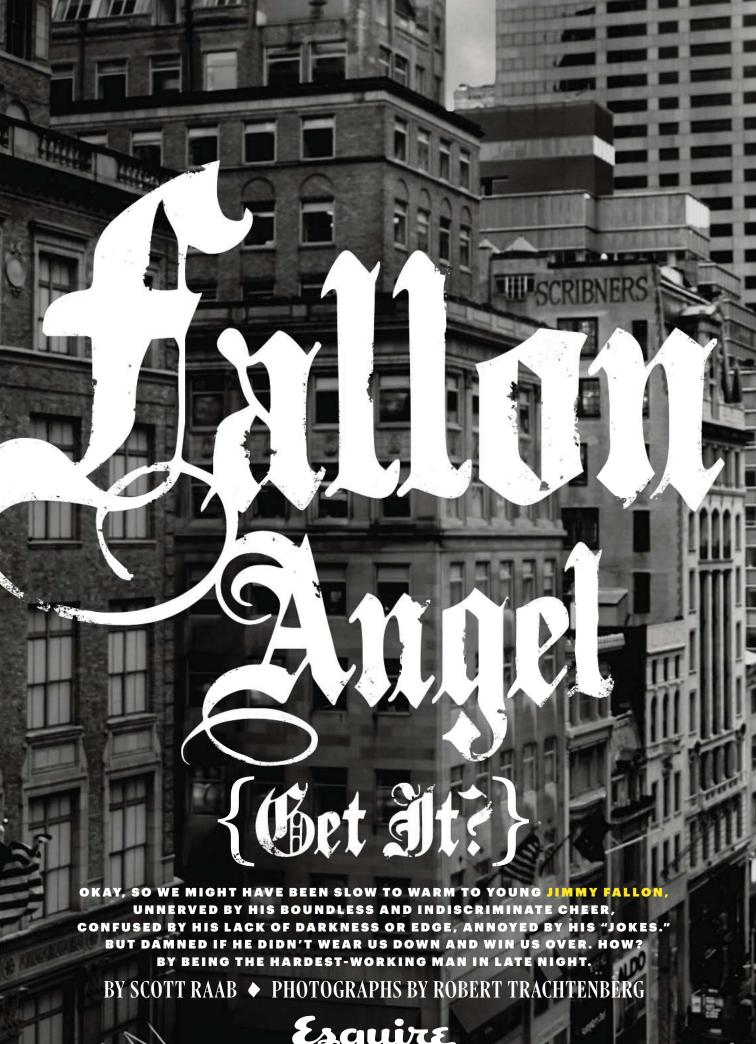


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JIMMY FALLON'S ON HOLIDAY IN IRELAND A FEW YEARS BACK, HAVING A GREAT TIME, AS JIMMY FALLON GENERALLY DOES, BUT ÁFTÉR A FEW TOO MANY NIGHTS SPENT HOISTING A FEW TOO MANY GUINNESSES, HE NEEDS A WEE BREAK.

So I plan this fishing trip at six in the morning, just so I won't drink the night before. My hotel makes me a packed lunch, a thermos, the whole thing. I'm walking to the water, the sea, and I go, Ah, it's beautiful. There was a mist coming off the sea, and out of this mist is this great old Irishman in a boat. I go, Gosh, I want to paint this. He goes Ah, let me help you in there."

Jimmy's brogue is solid. He's an eager storyteller, Light-handed. Lighthearted, Swift.

"I'm sitting there going, Wow, this is just great. I'm going to love this. So I pour myself a coffee and he says, 'Oh, are ye enjoying yourself? Hand me yer flask there.' And he dumps the coffee in the sea and he pulls out a bottle. 'This is Jameson 1890. I only give this to special people.' By eight in the morning, I was just wasted. We didn't catch anything-there was a line in the back, but we just talked and laughed and cruised around. We had such a fun time. It was just so awesome—I don't even remember what we talked about. I probably bored him. I probably bored him to death."

That's just the lad's skittish modesty, and even that rings ebullient, not false. We're in his Tonight Show corner office at 30 Rock and his workday has only begun. His broad face is still sleepy and his tie is loose and his shirt is untucked and he's grinning and handing me a small carton of something cold.

"Let me tell you something-I do love chocolate. In fact, I'm drinking chocolate-milk coffee. Have you heard of this? Do you drink coffee at all? I have two. This is going to be great. I didn't even have a sip yet. You have to try it. You're going to freak out. This is a game changer. I want to witness this."

I'm trying to figure out which end to open... there we go.

"When was the last time you opened up a milk carton like that grade school!"

I take a swig. It's strong. It would be better without chocolate milk, and it's no game changer, but it would be unkind to say so.

It's pretty good.

"It's fantastic!"

He is delighted, his eyes wide open now. No cameras, no audience, but it feels like excitement. Choco-coffee-milk. It feels good. It's almost like a talk show.

IT TOOK ME YEARS TO WARM UP TO HMMY FALLON. MANY YEARS.

In 2009, after Fallon debuted as the host of Late Night, I made a joke in Esquire about needing two blindfolds to bear watching him host a talk show. By the time I did a Q&A with Questlove, in 2013, I had been softened enough by my love of the Roots and by Fallon's peerless, eerie Neil Young to tune in, and Fallon was still bubbly and gushing, but in truth, I'd given up late-night TV, Stewart and Colbert included, in favor of reading. One of the things I

read, by the estimable Emily Nussbaum, was a vicious dismissal of Fallon not long after he took

over The Tonight Show in early 2014, a verbal beat-down so nasty-"The man's a lox" was Nussbaum's kindest cut—and finally so absurd—Nussbaum winds up comparing Fallon unfavorably with Ed Sullivan, a veritable fern—that it actually got me thinking about Jimmy Fallon again, and not just because I love lox deeply.

Nussbaum's Jimmy-whacking came by way of her hopes and fears for Colbert's Late Show and—God love her—her damning of late night's unvielding fetish for white-male hosts, which then got me thinking about the murderous late-night network hosting job itself.

There's nowhere to hide on Jupiter's throne—not for five nights a week, week after week, month after month, year after year. The truest, bestest scripted television show in the history of this capitalist videocracy we like to call America was The Larry Sanders Show, about a talk-show host. We saw its ugly truths—about both the job and the monomaniacs who seek and cling to it-play out in real time during the decaying and entombment of both Leno and Letterman, who were bequeathed none of Johnny Carson's singular might, a shadow of his audience, and more misery than Johnny ever leaked. Years before leaving, Dave was counting the days while Jay had long since melted to a waxen sheen. Long before the end, they were unwatchable.

It's early in his reign, and Colbert has only just begun, but goofy Jimmy Fallon's doing fine so far by playing to his strengths: music, mimicry, and games. He's still having a fantastic night every night, his guests are having a great time playing along, and the Roots remain fresh. His three to four million nightly viewers outnumber and out-youth every other rival's so far. Fallon's not lox, but he's not bad. You may not catch a fish, but you'll get wasted.

As for Jimmy himself, well, five hours a week on TV selling yourself and everything else in the world as fast as you can-first because you can, and then because you're the bell cow for twohundred-plus show employees and the network itself, and finally because you have become the job, can barely imagine yourself not there behind the desk-might indeed feel fantastic, and ten or twenty million bucks is an unfathomable salary, but it won't buy back your soul. One must have the steel to endure it—not just chococoffee-milk—even Jimmy Fallon, happy as hell just to be here.

WHICH IS HOW WE GOT TO THE IRELAND STORY:

I'm looking for some steel beneath the fairy-tale facts of life for the kid who watched Saturday Night Live in his teens, just him and a six-pack, studying it, worshipping it, making hajj to Belushi's grave, dreaming of the day he'd get a shot. Fallon made it to SNL by the age of twenty-three. After six seasons, he left and starred in two movies-Taxi and Fever Pitch-that tanked, tanked hard,









and so he went back to TV, and kept working his ass off, and kept quiet while NBC tortured Conan and drained the last drops from Leno's corpse, and I'm guessing that somewhere within Jimmy Fallon must be a motherfucker with some steel, right?

"I think it's my grandfather. He was the typical great Irish cop-tall, white hair, red nose. He was friendly and happy. He loved to hear songs and sing and drink and have a great time. But also, do it the right way, be respectful, never forget where you came from-that whole thing. You don't take anything for free. You don't stop. I like to work at everything I get."

He's friendly. Happy. I know not how, but he is. Born in Brooklyn, he grew up in Saugerties, a good boy, an altar boy in a blue-collar upstate town, with a family so loving that James and Gloria Fallon, his parents, named their son James and their daughter Gloria, and Little Jimmy's grandparents moved upstate with them. He worked stand-up while he went to college, a Catholic school not far from home, and left to seek his comic fortune in Los Angeles a semester before graduation.

Ballsy move.

"Well, I had already taken the postal exam. My parents made me take the postal exam. That's how much they believed in my comedy."

How'd that go?

"It was great! I loved it. I like taking tests. My parents took it with me."

What?

"My dad and my mom took it with me."

How'd you do?

"I crushed. I thought a mailman would be a great gig. 'Oh my gosh, you get to wear shorts'-that's your uniform. It's insane. Driving a special vehicle, the steering wheel's on the other side? What is this?"

You like dogs?

"I do like dogs. I mean, people would love me. I'd be a great mailman."

I tell Jimmy that I was puzzling over his flagrant bonhomie a few days ago, eating diner breakfast with a friend-another fretful writing Jew-and we agreed that Fallon simply isn't angry. He seems to nurse no grudge, no rage, no weeping childhood wound.

"Yeah. There's no darkness on this one."

Feeling any pressure? Colbert opened big last week. And he's Colbert.

"That's the way Colbert will succeed-by being him. He's not Letterman and I'm not Leno. No one's the new anyone. He's him, I'm me. Don't even compare us—to anybody. I'm me. He's him. Like, that's the way it is. We're totally ourselves. And that's the only way you're going to succeed. You have to be yourself, or else you can tell that it's ungenuine."

He's not wrong. Fallon's excitement seems unfeigned even in this office, but onscreen it feels simpleminded and wholly undiscerning-to me. To me, too often, the show tastes like mush and sounds like a slumber party for a Wayne's World without irony or books. But then I'm the yutz who saw Colbert work the White House Correspondents' Dinner and felt my blood rise hot, as if I myself had coldcocked W. I'm the putz who finds Primo Levi entertaining. If you can't show me a hero or a parcel of human suffering, you can at least spare me Chris Christie dancing.

"But that was a good bit! 'Dad Dancing' was a good bit for him." Precisely why it drove me nuts. I live in north Jersey. I had my fill of Christie years ago. He's a lout.



"There's always gonna be people not liking that you have any politician on, one side or the other. And people are like, 'Ugh, you gave him softballs.' But I didn't really give him softballs—we had an actual conversation. I'm doing a variety show. I'm doing a talk show-let's have a conversation. I don't have one side or the other. My fans know that. I don't have to cater to anybody. I'm not The Daily Show. We don't want to be The Daily Show."

This isn't Jimmy Fallon's favorite topic—the softball thing, the fact that he's not tilting at windmills or fighting to save America's soul from his bunker on the sixth floor of what is, at least for the moment, the Comcast Building. It's not my favorite topic, either. In Tales of the Hasidim, Buber tells of Rabbi Zusya, who stood before the throne on Judgment Day worried that God would ask, Why weren't you Moses? Why weren't you Solomon? Why weren't you at least Maimonides? But his Creator simply asked, Why weren't you Zusya?

Jimmy Fallon's Jimmy Fallon. He'll never be the darling of the seething elites. He knows that. He's read all about it. For years.

"We've been doing the same show since I started on Late Night. I'm here every night. I'm filling up an hour. I've done everything I've always done. I still do. I dance, I sing with people, impressions if Trump does something crazy, or if whoever I can impersonate does something, we gotta do it. We have to. It's what I do. It's television. It's like putting out an article every day."

It's his business, show business, and now his competition has stiffened: Colbert.

"Yeah, definitely. It's good. It just makes everyone work a little bit harder. This is my Madison Square Garden. This is my home court, I'm comfortable here-this is where I play the best. I've



learned from the best coaches and played with the best players. And I'm not worried. I play to win."

Do you look at the numbers? So far, so good.

"I see them now and then. When they're good, I can't help it because people will e-mail me. When they're not good, when they're stagnant, I don't hear from anybody. I talked to Jay Leno about this—he told me, "They're gonna go up and down. Don't worry about that side of it—just do your thing and have fun.' Other people get paid to worry about those things. I don't."

Fallon has a writers' meeting waiting, and rehearsals, but first he shows me a video on his phone of his two-year-old daughter dancing.

That's so nice, I say. True: She is adorable. And so is the fact that Fallon has put music behind the clip, Elton John's "Tiny Dancer."

"I mean, come on." Fallon's lit. "The light and everything, her spinning around. That's how she dances. Just spinning."

She's literally a tiny dancer, I say.

"She actually is a tiny dancer."

On the way out the door, he points out a stained-glass portrait of Buddy Holly—rock's sweetest, whitest, least conflicted Founding Father—and a pair of framed photos, both shot from behind the *Tonight Show* desk.

"That's me and Billy Joel. That's Johnny and Jane Fonda. Isn't that cool? It's the same room—that's the same exit sign. The audience is kind of the same. But look—he has a cigarette, he's using the ashtray there. I have a laptop there. That's the only difference. You go, 'Oh, it's basically the same thing we're doing.'"

That's the best product placement Apple could ever want.

"Oh, yeah. By the way, they never wanted to pay us for that." I'm assuming they wound up paying.

"Yeah, they wound up paying. Yeah."

It's a business.

"Well, that's what TV is. We're selling things. It's television. Once you get over that, you'll enjoy it much better."

HE'S NOT WRONG. THE SHOW THAT NIGHT IS FANTASTIC.

Benicio Del Toro, Jessica Alba, Miguel—and still it's fantastic. A bit of filmed bromance with Justin Timberlake and Jimmy, with a Will Ferrell cameo, plus a movie-title guessing game with all his guests, and a clip from *Sicario*, and a blown-up video of Benicio's two tortoises—he got them at a pet shop in Vegas!—humping, and yet the whole show is absolutely fantastic, and I savor each moment.

I can explain this with mob science: Sitting with 250 shrieking, cawing, clapping human beings having the best time of their lives, I'm freed from thought and care. It matters not at all what we're seeing—though I'd like to think that were it a public hanging or witch burning, we'd feel concern, if not alarm. All that matters

is this feeling like there's something very exciting going on, and we're part of it and it is part of us—some freak rapture beyond reason.

I can also explain my temporary insanity more simply. A little song, a little dance, a little seltzer down his pants: Whatever it takes to entertain, to slap a smile on a stranger's face, Jimmy Fallon is pleased to do it. If you yourself are not that stranger—or if you need a late-night knight to channel your rage over our collective descent into national dementia—that may be your problem, not Jimmy Fallon.

My NBC keeper sat me on an aisle near the back, and Jimmy trots up the stairs as he does

at show's end every night, and when he sees me standing and applauding, he lights up and stops to give me a big hug. Me. And I hug Jimmy Fallon back, hard. And I feel . . . fantastic. Me.

I'M CIRCLING BACK THAT NIGHT TO MEET HIM IN THE MAKEUP ROOM, BUT

I have spent the intervening time walking around midtown thinking about the hug, and about the episode of *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*: When Seinfeld picks up Fallon, Jimmy's wearing a tie, and just before Jimmy digs into his pancakes, he says, "This is really, really going to be a great pancake," and afterward, when Seinfeld's Corvette needs a jump, Jerry turns to Jimmy and says, "I'm glad I'm with you—you bring out my good side." This is no small thing. There's a fair chance that I've sold Jimmy Fallon's spirit short, and a smaller chance that he's actually an angel.

Fallon's being groomed to look like Terrence Howard for an *Empire* parody sketch, "Jimpire," and he's listening to Howard's dialogue, trying to nail the voice.

"He's almost crying in all the serious scenes," says Fallon. "He sounds like he's always on the verge of losing it."

Great show tonight, I say.

"Was it fun?"

It was a lot of fun.

"It's like you're hosting a party, putting a show on. It's old-time. It's cool. Let's put on a *Little Rascals*—it's simple."

The hug felt great. Thank you.

"It was a surprise to me—Hey, what's up? And I hugged you like my old pal."

They're filming part of "Jimpire" on the Randall's Island waterfront, just across the Harlem River and smack under the Triborough Bridge. On the way over, he's yawning; he's been at work for nine hours now. He pulls out his briefcase—a battered brown Lederer his wife gave him for good luck when Jimmy landed *Late Night*, and speaking of product placement, I could use one, too—which he totes to work each day.

"It's magic. I've eaten food off of this many times." He opens it.

"So there's three art pens, in case I feel like I want to sketch someone, one nice pen in case I have to read my writing, a giant Black-Berry Passport—the letter *C* doesn't work, so I can say, 'No, I didn't see Olbert last night.' A notebook where I write down my diet, the Tylenol I have to take, and this stretchy glove to pull my fingers."

In early summer, Fallon slipped on a rug in his kitchen, caught his ring finger on a countertop as he tried breaking his fall, and suffered a ring avulsion of the fourth finger of his left hand. It was a ghastly injury—six hours of microsurgery saved the finger, but Fallon spent ten days in intensive care, and he missed two weeks behind his Studio 6B desk. Months later, the finger

is still in physical therapy, Fallon's still hoping to regain feeling in it, and would be even weeks later, as he recovered from falling and cutting up his *other* hand.

"Are we gonna see the Pepsi sign?" he asks the driver. "Did we pass it already?"

He's looking eastward, to Queens, Long Island City, but it's too late.

I ask Fallon what he drives.

"The family car is a red Land Rover. I drive a truck—F-150 King Ranch. Leno told me to get a truck. I called Leno and said, 'I'm gonna get a car. I got a place in Sagaponack, and I was thinking about this old Mercedes.' He goes, 'Yeah,

Fallon: I have an idea. Let's do a Raabcast!

Raab: Okay. Uh, my guest tonight—we're live from the Tick Tock Diner—is young Jimmy Fallon.
Fallon [laughs]:
Young Jimmy Fallon....
Do you get vacation?
My last vacation was my finger—it was a two-week break and I was in the ICU for ten days.
That's not a vacation.
Nooo, oh my gosh.

yeah-there's a lot of old Mercedes."

Fallon's Leno is first-rate.

"I go, 'It's an SL-something.' He goes, 'Uh-huh. That's not helping.' I go, 'There's a green one and a blue one.' Jay goes, 'Jimmy, why are you getting an old car? Do you like working on old cars? Do you know how to fix a car when it breaks down?' 'No.' He goes, 'Jimmy, if I were you, I'd just get a truck. You live in a farmhouse. Get a nice truck.'"

There's a crew of forty or fifty waiting for Fallon at the shoot, which runs more than two hours in the hope of getting three or four minutes of television time. Fallon's costumed like Lucious Lyon, Terrence Howard's *Empire* character, in a dark topcoat and driving cap, and his facial hair is perfect, but he's still working on his dialogue. It's windy, and the traffic on the bridge above us roars like surf. I see his lips moving, but I can't hear a thing until he walks back over.

"Fun, right? We got the best crew—great audio, great location. Everything's great. Perfect. It'll turn out great."

Two hours later—twelve hours since he got to work—Jimmy's still chipper.

"What a great job the prop department did—putting a bullet in a whoopee cushion! We didn't get an Emmy last year, so we're going for it this year. We're trying. We have a fart joke that hasn't been done."

TURNS OUT THOSE TWO HOURS ON RANDALL'S ISLAND

were all for naught. "Jimpire" ran, and it was fantastic—four and a half million YouTube viewers can't be wrong—but it ran more than ten minutes, an eon by television standards, even without the fart joke.

"Yeah, we had to cut it out. It was going to be fifteen minutes—we can't make it that long, ever. We have a show to do. The scene's so beautiful, too, the way they shot it. Heartbreaking."

Still, life is good. Last week, Fallon flew to Los Angeles for the Emmys—*Tonight* won an award for its social-media prowess—and now he's back behind the desk. His ratings have dropped a bit, but he's still beating Colbert. He finished taping tonight's show, squeezed through the Lincoln Tunnel to Route 3, and rode west, west through the swampland funk and dusk, west to Clifton, New Jersey, west to the Tick Tock Diner. I happened to mention the

place two weeks ago, when we met in Fallon's office and I spoke of how he has no wound, no rage, no visible darkness, and Jimmy remembered the name of the joint and wanted to check it out.

"Best diner I've ever seen," he says as he steps out of the car. He's not wrong. The Tick Tock is the best diner the world has ever seen, lit by neon all night long, all night long surrounded by death. Walt Whitman still comes here. Plus Devils fans, priests, and hitmen.

Mighty generous of you, Jimmy. Thanks.

"Oh, I'm so excited about this! Are you kidding me? I'm so psyched! I'm starving. I'm so hungry I cannot wait to eat."

He's still wearing his suit pants and white shirt and tie, unknotted, with some of the makeup still on his face. It's a Tuesday night, 7:30, the place is slowish, but Jimmy Fallon is a party of one. We split an order of the Disco Fries—with mozzarella melted on top, gravy on the side—and Jimmy orders a Pattie Melt.

"It's a hamburger, but it's also grilled cheese.

It's the best of both worlds. It's fantastic."

I go for the Diablo burger, and while I'll vouch for the fact that it, too, is fantastic, a Tick Tock breakfast remains your best bet.

The hardest part of the job?

"It's just coming up with more ideas. I can't turn it off. I dream about ideas. I had a dream the other night that I started a new job in California Speaking of ideas—I have a thousand ideas—here's my new idea. It's not my idea, but it's one of my ideas, is to have a toast-flavored muffin. Toast?
Yeah. 'Cause everyone's eating muffins for breakfast, and I go, "That's cake."
It is cake.
Eating cake....
This is a brilliant idea.

I know. I could make

millions off of it.

for a friend of mine who used to write on the show. I go, 'What do you do here?' He goes, 'Anything.' 'But what do you mean—do I go come up with ideas? Like a Web site or something? What do you want me to do?'"

You were worried?

"I felt like I wasn't fitting in and I wasn't getting the idea of what the job is. I eventually just woke myself up. I don't know what it means."

It means that you're the host of *The Tonight Show*. There's nowhere else to go. This is it.

"This is the thing. Jerry Seinfeld said, 'This is it. There is no job after this. You understand that. Once you do this, that's it. You don't go back to doing anything. You do the talk show. You're a talk-show host. You do it forever.' I go, 'Like the pope?' 'That's right—it's a pope job. You just do it till they're picking your head up and you mumble something and your head goes back down.'"

Fallon's Seinfeld is fantastic. Honest. And the thought of still being tethered to the desk in 2040 doesn't faze him.

"I don't even know if TV will be around. I don't know what's going to go down, but it's fun. And while you're here, you might as well do it, and have a good time doing it."

Seems like the right choice, if it's a choice.

"It is a choice," he says.

Fallon's not wrong. I'm reminded of Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl, an Auschwitz survivor who became a psychotherapist after his liberation, wrote, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstanc-

es, to choose one's own way."

"Frankl," says Jimmy Fallon. "Man's Search for Meaning. I read that book while I was in the ICU—my doctor told me to read it. I highlighted quotes and things. I e-mailed all my friends. I'm like, 'Dude, you have to read this book—I know the meaning of life.'"

I have sold Jimmy way too short, not to mention life itself. Fallon is in fact an angel. His kindness in making this journey is not lost upon me. There is no gesture of love so unfelt—so small, so self-serving, so manipulative—that it is itself devoid of love.

The waiter comes, asking about the Pattie Melt.

Fallon fairly grunts with orginatic pleasure. "It's so deliciously perfect."

In the end, I guess there are no bad hugs. You needn't like *The Tonight Show* or cherish Jimmy Fallon any more than you believe in Santa Claus. It's television, after all, not lox, but, given the devouring worm awaiting us all, it's *fantastic*. 12

I had an idea—it's not funny, or else I'd do it on the an idea? I think, if you go to a sporting event—any stadium, anything-your do you do? [Raises his arms.] It's prime real estate. Why are there no logos in the armpits? So I go, That should be a thing. So anyways, this is a true story, and knock on [raps table with knuckle] whatever this is, I go to meet this company. I go, "Yeah, I got this idea." They go, Yeah, we saw the idea. I go, "Call it Pitz. P-I-T-Z." They go, "We don't like the name, but we love the idea. We want to partner with you on this. This is great." Long story short, I met with the NBA, the NHL, Major League Baseball. Let me tell you some thing: They freaked out.





Two-button virgin-wool tuxedo (\$5,970) by Brunello Cucinelli; cotton evening shirt (\$858) by Kiton; cotton pocket square (\$75) by Joseph Abboud; cuff links (\$320) by Dunhill.

like they belong to another time the future.







Colin Trevorrow

ALSO KNOWN AS: THE GUY
WHO MADE JURASSIC WORLD

Which is all the more remarkable given that Trevorrow's only directing gig prior to helming the highest-grossing film of 2015 was Safety Not Guaranteed, a smart, small movie from 2012 that he probably never expected many people to see. Jurassic World, though: "It had to play for everyone," says Trevorrow, 39. "That kind of global entertainment runs the risk of turning into airplane food-just barely good enough to satisfy everyone, but great for no one. We tried to surprise people and play with expectations." Up next for Trevorrow (rhymes with tomorrow): He's directing a drama starring Naomi Watts, The Book of Henry, and cowriting the screenplay for a Jurassic World sequel before directing Star Wars: Episode IX. "I won't be phoning any of this in," he promises. "I'm still hungry."

Single-button wool tuxedo (\$1,795) by Calvin Klein Collection; cotton shirt (\$395) by Turnbull & Asser; silk scarf (\$400) by Dior Homme.

Sloane Crosley

NOVELIST BEHIND THE CLASP

She had us at "Jesus, she's got shit on her floor." That line, from a true story about a phantom pooper at a party, was just one of the reasons Crosley's debut collection of humor essays, I Was Told There'd Be Cake, sold a whole lot of books back in 2008. This year, the 37-year-old former literary publicist brought her wise, wiseass sensibility to the land of makebelieve with her first novel, The Clasp. "I always wanted to write fiction," she says, "but I wanted to make sure I wasn't going to write some roman à clef about a bunch of kids in Brooklyn." Instead she wrote a globe-trotting caper featuring three friends pushing 30, a stolen necklace, Nazis, and Guy de Maupassant's haunting short story "The Necklace." It's funny, too.

Dress and cuff bracelet by Lanvin.





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Esquire

Trevor Noah ALSO KNOWN AS: THE GUY WHO TOOK OVER THE DAILY SHOW

Due respect to Messrs. Colbert and Holt, but Noah had the biggest shoes to fill this year. Taking over not for a fading legend or a disgraced star but for a beloved cultural figure in his prime, the 31-year-old sat down in *The Daily Show*'s anchor chair in September and looked, if not felt, instantly at home. "It's easy to watch it from the outside," he says, "but once you're in the seat, you feel the weight of what is happening. There's so much more that comes with it than just sitting in the chair and telling jokes." As Noah & Co. begin preparing for Indecision 2016, he considers his newness to America (and his early life in South Africa) an asset. "The curse is that I may not have the familiarity with the material that Jon Stewart had, but the blessing is that I may come to a conclusion that nobody else would have. It's a totally new process for me."

Two-button wool-and-mohair suit (\$2,775) by Gucci; cotton shirt (\$380) by Jeffrey Rüdes; silk tie (\$150) by Pal Zileri.

Dan Price

WHO GAVE EVERYONE A RAISE

Well, not everyone. But back in April, Price established a minimum salary of \$70,000 at his Seattle-based credit-cardprocessing company, Gravity Payments, after reading a study about income and happiness. The Today show and The New York Times ran features on him, followed by everyone else, and Price, 31, became a folk hero for the age of inequality. "Business is looking good, but it's still kind of early to say," he says of the impact on Gravity's bottom line. "We know that if we do well, it might cause more companies to be able to do this type of thing, and if we don't do well, then it'll probably discourage other entrepreneurs from following suit. We took it on as a challenge."

Double-breasted velvet dinner jacket (\$2,995), cotton evening shirt (\$695), and satin bow tie (\$155) by Ralph Lauren; silk pocket square (price upon request) by Stefano Ricci; onyx-and-silver stud set (\$395) by Brooks Brothers.









THE

GOLDEN CHILD

J. J. Abrams—
the most influential film
and TV maker in
Hollywood—is the scion
of the very movies he
is now making. He is
not just reanimating
Star Wars. He is
what Star Wars
begot.

BY MIKE SAGER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFF MINTON



was four years younger and watched his every move. She, in turn, was his favorite subject. In countless gory films and shorts she was strangled, shot, pushed off a roof, attacked by zombies, taken away by aliens. Often, he would wake her up in the middle of the night. You've got to hear this...you've got to watch this...you've got to see what I just did. And she was always like, Oh my God! Once, he made a six-foot-long pencil and took it to school. It looked exactly like a yellow Ticonderoga No. 2. When she asked him why he'd gone to such lengths, he looked at her. "I don't know," he said. "I just thought it would be funny."

He was never a great student. He didn't play sports. At recess he was sometimes seen looking through his fingers as if they were a camera lens and observing other kids. When he was in kindergarten or first grade, his teacher called his mom, concerned that he was refusing to participate in games of dodgeball with the rest of the class.

Are you aware, the teacher asked, that your son is bringing a red cape to school? He runs around the playground pretending to fly like Superman and making up stories.

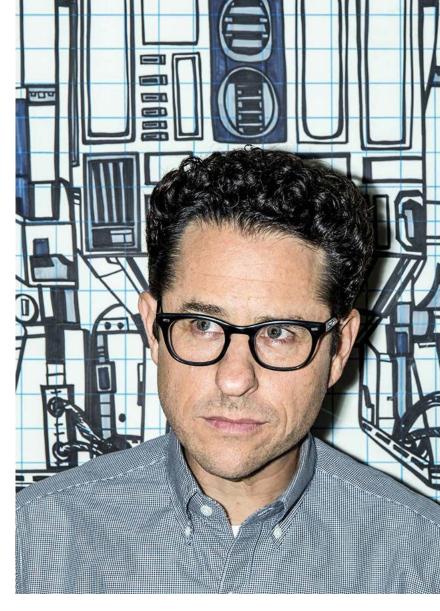
NOT SO LONG AGO, ON THE far edge of Santa Monica, Jeffrey Jacob Abrams, known since birth as J.J., bounds down a floating staircase into the waiting area of the National Typewriter Company, the fanciful name on the redbrick building that houses his movie and TV empire, Bad Robot.

Outside, a glowing sign over the doorbell asks ARE YOU READY? Inside, the reception desk showcases a vintage collection of toy robots. Carved out of the foyer space, with its high ceiling and exposed beams, its big windows in place of walls, is a waiting area surrounded on three sides by shelves loaded to capacity with toys, magic tricks, antique movie cameras. There are Star

Trek, Star Wars, and Spy vs. Spy figurines, all carefully posed. Plastic Aurora models of the Hunchback of Notre Dame and Godzilla; an original Planet of the Apes ape-head prosthesis in a plastic case; collector's-edition dolls of the pig-faced doctor and nurse from "Eye of the Beholder," a classic episode of The Twilight Zone. A stack of board games from Parker Brothers and Ideal, including Close Encounters of the Third Kind, The Six Million Dollar Man, and Mission: Impossible. On a coffee table are bins of pens, markers, colored pencils, and drawing paper. A sign suggests: PLEASE CREATE.

Abrams is wearing his customary sneakers, blue jeans, and plaid shirt. At forty-nine, he is a father of three and no longer chubby; he has the paleo-diet, high-thread-count veneer of the Hollywood affluent. His dark shock of wavy hair has been likened to that of Zeppo Marx. Geeky black-framed glasses rest on a bulb of a nose that shadows a delighted smile. Like a character in one of his timebending plots, he seems perpetually in awe of his surroundings. How did I end up here?

Leading a tour, Abrams points out the various zones in his work space—the editing bays, a recording studio, a prop workshop, a screening room, a new kitchen under construction. His sister, Tracy Rosen, now a screenwriter, calls the offices of Bad Robot "a glorified version of his bedroom." Damon Lindelof, showrunner of Lost—one of a slew of beloved TV series Abrams has produced—has called the refurbished building "a self-contained Death Star." From here Abrams has seemingly conquered the entertainment galaxy.

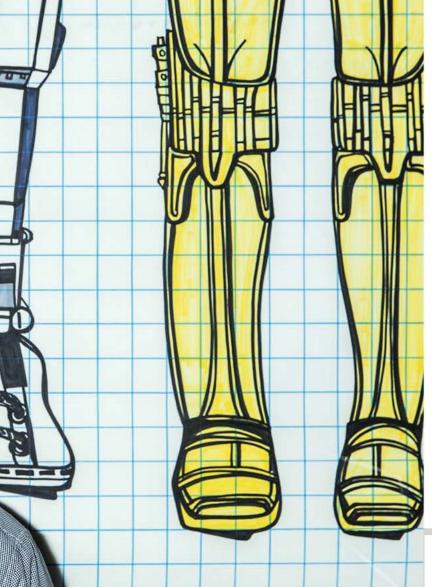


As a writer, composer, director, and producer, Abrams may well be the most hyphenated mogul the film industry has ever seen; he is certainly among the most influential of his time. Abrams's particular storytelling sensibilities have become the prevailing recipe for popular entertainment. Tangled, deceptive serial plots that jump back and forth in time; a liberal pinch of magical realism; rich, stylish, and playful cinematography; eerie music that evokes early horror films (the one-note theme he composed for *Lost* on a Spectrasonics synthesizer won an ASCAP award)—all of it liberally buttered and salted with the kind of romance, mystery, swelling strings, and schmaltz that is the stuff of classic Hollywood, of classic drama. And the special effects are totally awesome.

"He's a seriously empathic storyteller, which means that he does not selfishly put stories out there that only mean a lot to him and may not mean much to anyone else," says Steven Spielberg, who has worked with Abrams since Abrams was a teenager. "He puts stories out there from a very large heart that are simpatico with a lot of other people's needs and desires. J. J. is the kind of director who can make an audience's dreams come true."

Over the past three decades, Abrams has had a hand in more than thirty movies and television series, the most significant of which has been *Lost*, the supernatural network megahit that helped turn small-screen programming away from the formulaic one-offs of the Dick Wolf/*Law & Order* era and toward the addictive serials we binge-watch today.





which the Walt Disney Company acquired the rights to the *Star Wars* juggernaut from George Lucas, the movie is the first of a new trilogy Abrams is slated to produce. The second is already in production.

We walk around the first floor; Abrams points out some of his trophies. Side by side on a wall are the shooting slates from the last scene of *The Force Awakens* and the last scene of *High Voltage*, a film he made when he was fifteen that eventually brought him to the attention of Spielberg's then-assistant, Kennedy. It was she, as head of Lucasfilm under the Disney umbrella, who hired him for the *Star Wars* gig.

Abrams pauses in front of an antique machine that looks like a huge glass jukebox with no records inside. A vintage Mold-A-Rama, like the ones manufactured for the 1964 New York World's Fair, it offers visitors the opportunity to make their own plastic replica of the Bad Robot logo, which appears at the beginning or end of all his movies and TV shows and which Abrams created at home one weekend with Adobe After Effects. (His two eldest kids supplied the voices that chirp "Bad Robot.")

"They used to have one of these at Universal Studios," he says, patting the antique machine fondly, as if it were a loyal old dog. "I remember the first time I went on the tour, I got the Frankenstein head. Now you can get a Bad Robot. You wanna try?"

Perhaps even more significant has been Abrams's longtime collaboration with a group of close friends and mentors, all of whom he met by the time he was a freshman in high school. Including actor Greg Grunberg (Alias, Heroes, Heroes Reborn), cinematographer Larry Fong (Lost and the movies 300 and Watchmen), writer-director-producer Matt Reeves (Felicity, Dawn of the Planet of the Apes), Kathleen Kennedy (the president of Lucasfilm), and Spielberg, the group forms a sort of Algonquin Round Table of the postmodern movie era. Instead of drinking heavily, this crowd favors magic and monsters. Many a blockbuster idea has been hatched on weekends, at family dinners, in the parking lots of the various Westside schools their children attended together.

More recently, Abrams has been handed the reins to a number of flagging big-screen franchises. He breathed life into Tom Cruise's tired Mission: Impossible series (directing M:I:III and producing its sequels, Ghost Protocol and this year's Rogue Nation) and overhauled Star Trek (directing the Star Trek relaunch in 2009 and Star Trek into Darkness in 2013), bringing a more human element to the Vulcan-dry techno-gasmic scripts of the past.

Now comes Star Wars: The Force Awakens, among the most widely anticipated movies in history, which Abrams has directed and produced. The spawn of a \$4 billion megadeal in

UPSTAIRS IN HIS OFFICE, Abramstakes a seat on the sofa. Two plastic cups of raw nuts have been arranged before us, a small plastic spoon in each. To his immediate left is a life-sized rubber head in a glass case,

a likeness of Douglas Fairbanks Jr. crafted by Abrams's childhood idol Dick Smith for the movie *Ghost Story*.

"I was always a little bit of the outsider," Abrams is saying of his caped youth. "I wasn't athletic. And I was never a particularly great student. You find yourself somewhere in between the schoolyard and the library. That's the gray area of no-man's-land. You have to find something that interests you, something to focus on."

Abrams was born on Long Island; his family moved to Los Angeles when he was five. The firstborn grandchild and only son in a Jewish family, Abrams was always the "nexus of the house," according to his sister. Their father is Gerald W. Abrams, a *Mad*

Men-era ad salesman for CBS who quit his high-paying job in the early seventies to take a shot at movie producing. Over the past four decades, he has produced something like seventy films for television, many of them Movies of the Week. Still active in Hollywood, he recently produced Houdini, with Adrien Brody, for the History channel. It was television's top-rated miniseries of 2014.

Abrams's mother, the former Carol Kelvin, was herself a dynamo. When the kids were young, she sold real estate. At age thirty-nine, she enrolled at Whittier College School of Law and graduated first in her class. Eventually she



became a professor at Whittier, teaching for five years before embarking on her own career as a movie producer. Later she would coauthor two books. She died of cancer in 2012 at sixty-nine.

By far Abrams's biggest influence as a child was his maternal grandfather-Abrams fans can find references to Harry Kelvin buried in much of his work. There is a U.S.S. Kelvin in the Star Trek reboot. On Lost, Kelvin is the guy who occupied the Swan Hatch before Desmond. In M:I:III, there's a postcard addressed to H. Kelvin; on the series Fringe, a character works on a project called "Kelvin Genetics"; in Super 8, the service station where the alien first appears sells Kelvin brand gas-the large sign from the movie is sitting against a wall downstairs at Bad Robot, waiting to be hung.

Harry Kelvin owned an electronics business, first in TriBeCa in Lower Manhattan, later in Farmingdale on Long Island. Starting when Abrams was very young, the pair would frequently visit Tannen's Magic Shop, the oldest operating magic store in Manhattan. To get to the bathroom in Abrams's private office at Bad Robot, you go to the bookshelf beside his desk and tug on a copy of a book entitled Louis Tannen's Catalog of Mag-

At his electronics shop, Abrams remembers, his grandfather "would take apart radios and telephones, all kinds of electronics, and explain why and how they worked. In a way, when I was a little kid, he was more of a father figure than my father; like most dads of that era, mine was always busy working."

ic. The wall opens; the privy is revealed.

"J. J. was the son Grandpa never had," says Tracy. "They would go on adventure walks together, just walk around the neighborhood and make up stories. My grandfather was really influential for J. J. When you think about it, storytelling is a lot like electronics—it's all about how you take things apart and why each piece is necessary and where it fits in. The same is true of magic and illusion. That's what filmmaking is all about."

Kelvin also took Abrams on the Universal Studios tour. Abrams was seven or eight years old. "It was this aha moment

for me," he says. "I saw how movies used illusion in this grand way. They talked about technology in a way that was fascinating. The use of cameras and special effects and different techniques—it just felt like the answer to a question I didn't even know I was asking. Suddenly I realized: This is the thing I want to do."

ABRAMS BORROWED HIS DAD'S Super 8 camera and began to experiment. Ten years earlier, Kodak's introduction of the Super 8 format had revolutionized the consumer film industry. Unlike in the past, when movie equipment was large, complicated, and expensive, the Super 8 line of cameras, projectors, and editing machines were small and affordable. The film came preloaded into cartridges, making the process virtually foolproof, opening up the opportunity for home movies.

Actor Greg Grunberg met Abrams "in the sandbox" when they were both about five. (Abrams jokes that the age Grunberg claims becomes younger each year.) The boys were in the same troop of Indian Guides and went to the same elementary school. "I was into sports, but there was a side of me that wanted to be creative, and J. J. was incredibly creative," Grunberg says. "We'd walk to his house from school and J. J. would be splicing film or we'd shoot stuff. He'd be like, 'We've gotta get that shot of you driving your bike down the street.' There were always all kinds of things we had to shoot. I was the actor. It was more like I was helping him out."

One movie they made together was called The Attic, in which two kids find a hatch in the ceiling and unleash a monster-and then they have to hide it from the mom when she gets home. Grunberg's mom played the mom. Later, in postproduction, Abrams would add the monster to the movie by scratching its image on the film itself,

one frame at a time.

By then, Abrams's father was producing movies. Grunberg remembers Abrams bringing him along to the Paramount Studios lot, where the boys got to go on the sets of the television shows Mork & Mindy and Happy Days. Perhaps making up for lost time, Gerald Abrams sometimes brought his son along on trips to film sets around the world-together they went to Budapest, to Rome, to Germany for the filming of Berlin Tunnel 21. In London, Abrams met Michael Caine on the set of Jekyll & Hyde.

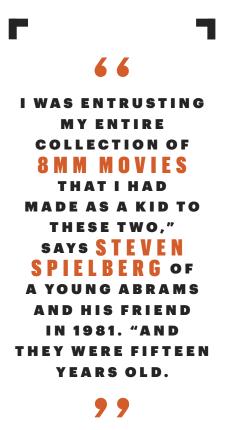
"I think he was fascinated that you could get to work with famous writers, producers, directors, actors, and actresses," Gerald Abrams says. "They fly you first class, put you up in first-class accommodations. And then the most unbelievable part was that after you did all this, they actually paid you. So he understood that concept from me. He saw that I was looking forward to getting up in the morning because work was exciting for me."

When Abrams was twelve or thirteen, he went outside one day to find two older kids making a movie of their own. Larry Fong was already in high school. He lived some distance away in Rolling Hills Estates; as it happened, he was visiting a friend whose parents were divorced—the

dad lived across the street from the Abrams family.

Fong was another self-professed "nerd" and "Star Wars fanboy" who had also appropriated his family's Super 8 camera. Back then, in the early 1980s, before the Internet, a kid had to work much harder to pursue interests that were off the beaten path. There was a lot of looking in the phone book, making calls, searching out the right specialty bookstores and magazines. "I had a lot of reference books for someone my age," Fong says. "Mostly about monsters and magic and film. When I went over to J. J.'s house the first time, I couldn't believe it. He had all the same books and magazines as I did. It was totally weird."

In those dying days of the analog world, Abrams says, the young filmmakers were left to wing it. "Nothing was ever easy. If you wanted to do a visual effect where you split the screen, for example, and wanted to have two versions of your sister at the same time, you would have to film something, then rewind the film, then figure out where you were, then block out the lens with a piece of tape and film it again. We made up the tricks and techniques as we







went along—like if you wanted to manually backwind the film, you could put a piece of Scotch tape over the capstan on the cartridge. It was almost like what hacking became, like an analog version of hacking. You'd go see something in the movies, some effect, and it would have an impact on people. You'd want to know how they did it. Invariably, six months later in *Super-8 Filmaker* magazine, they'd have an article. That was our YouTube."

Though Fong would go on to become a cinematographer (including on the upcoming *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*), his area of interest at the time was special effects. When Abrams was fifteen, he started working on *High Voltage*. He enlisted Fong's help.

"J. J. wanted to do this effect like in *Altered States* where the skin rippled," Fong says on the phone from Hawaii, where he is scouting locations for the *King Kong* reboot *Kong: Skull Island*. "I'd read about Dick Smith doing air bladders and whatnot to create his effects, so I got balloons and put them under a stocking and put them on the actor's arm. And then a bunch of us had tubes and were blowing air into these balloons that were wrapped around his arm, and it made this kind of weird ripple effect."

About this time, Abrams learned of a public-access show called *Word of Mouth*, hosted by a thirty-five-year-old named Gerard Ravel, who would interview musicians, actors, filmmakers—anyone interesting he could get. At the end of each show, Ravel would solicit calls from future prospective guests.

Abrams called. Inexplicably, Ravel humored him and drove out to Brentwood to see his stuff. "He put the films on his Super 8 projector, and I knew this kid was going to make it," Ravel told *Filmmaker* magazine a few years ago. He ended up doing two shows with Abrams. A week later Ravel got a call from another fifteen-year-old, Matt Reeves. He put the two kids in touch.

"I actually remember the first night I was talking to Matt on the phone. We talked for like four hours because it was literally like we had both found a twin," Abrams says. "We were both working on movies that were about—without any shock or surprise at all—losers in high school. His was a much more sophisticated, dark comedy that was a better story and a better movie. Mine was a special-effects-filled ridiculous comedy." Eventually their friendship and collaboration would lead to Abrams's first television show, *Felicity*.

Meeting all these film-mad teenagers, Ravel had an idea. What resulted was "The Best Teen Super 8mm Films of '81," held at L. A.'s Nuart Theatre in March 1982. Abrams submitted *High Voltage*, his special-effects loser comedy. Reeves screened a Hitchcockian thriller called *Stiletto*. Fong's film was a spoof called *Toast Encounters of the Burnt Kind*. Future producer Lawrence Trilling (*Parenthood*) and screenwriter Mark Sanderson (*I'll Remember April*) also had films in the lineup.

Abrams—above right as a teenager touching up a monster model in his bedroom—based the character Joe Lamb in Super 8 (and Lamb's bedroom), above left, on himself as a teenage filmmaker.
Right, a still from one of young J. J.'s own Super 8 monster movies.



The Los Angeles Times published a story about the festival, "Beardless Wonders of Film Making," so titled because their film-making idols—Spielberg, Lucas, Francis Ford Coppola, and Martin Scorsese—all had beards at the time... and these kids weren't even old enough to drive. Much of the piece was given over to Abrams, who told of making his first film, a work of claymation, at age seven. "I see stuff by Steven Spielberg and John Carpenter and I want to do it, too," he was quoted as saying.

Spielberg's then-assistant, Kathleen Kennedy, read the article in the *Times*. As it happened, sitting near her desk was a dusty cardboard box full of 8mm movies (the predecessor to Super 8) that Spielberg had made, starting when he was a middle-school kid. They'd only recently been retrieved from the basement of a house on the top of Lookout Mountain in the Hollywood Hills.

"A man called me saying, 'Hey, I found this box of movies and I think they belong to Steven Spielberg,'" Kennedy remembers. "At first I thought, 'Okay, there is *no way*, this is just some crackpot.' But it turned out to be absolutely true. The man lived in a house that Steven had lived in years ago. He'd left behind this box."

Kennedy laughs at the memory. "I have no idea why, but I read that article and I suddenly had this idea to say to Steven, 'Hey, why don't we hire these two young kids to clean up the film?'"

For Abrams, it was like receiving a call from on high. The films of Lucas and Spielberg had been "transformative and incredibly exciting," he recalls. "Star Wars and Close Encounters came out the same year. It was hard not to be a fanatic about those stories."

The Spielberg archive was in rough condition. Over the years, the tape or glue used for editing had broken down. Every single edit on every film needed to be respliced.

Spielberg says he took a hands-on role. "I was entrusting my entire collection of 8mm movies that I had made as a kid to these two up-and-coming Hollywood hopefuls. And they were fifteen years old. Absolutely I was very concerned. I wanted to make sure that they weren't going to try to reinvent the wheel."

For their work, Abrams and Reeves were paid \$150 each.

SOMETIME AROUND 2010, AS LOST WAS coming to the thunderous, befuddling conclusion of its award-winning sixyear run, Larry Fong got a call from Abrams. "There's a movie you have to do," Abrams said.

After graduating from high school, Abrams had gone off to Sarah Lawrence College in New York. During Christmas break in his senior year he ran into his friend Jill Mazursky, the daughter of Paul Mazursky (Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice, Down and Out in Beverly Hills). The two became writing partners; upon graduation they sold their first screenplay, Taking Care of Business, a 1990 comedy starring Jim Belushi. Next Abrams wrote Regarding Henry, starring Harrison Ford. A number of other films followed, including the 1998 megahit Armageddon. That same year, Abrams and Reeves created Felicity, a fan favorite that introduced Keri Russell and followed her adorably confused character through her four years at the fictional University of New York.

"So I'm starting to read and it's all about these kids. And slowly I find out the kids are making a movie to put in a film festival, and then all these fantastical things happen to them. Talk about personal. That was us. I don't know how much more personal a movie could get, although we never saw an alien or had a military conspiracy in our lives. When we were decorating the kid's bedroom for the film, J. J. was like, 'We gotta put magic tricks in his room and Famous Monsters comics.' We had all of our old magic books in the shot. It's those little things that no one else cares about that were huge for us, you know?"

The idea of Super 8, Abrams says, was to make a movie like the ones he'd grown up with, "sort of a lost Amblin movie," he says, referring to Spielberg's early production company, Amblin Entertainment, which produced E.T. and Gremlins. "There's something about that era that I have a fondness for. There's a sweetness and an innocence to that time and those characters. What's









In 2004, following the success of Alias, featuring Jennifer Garner as a grad-student superundercover double agent, ABC tapped Abrams to produce a prime-time drama that would capitalize on the success of the tropical reality show Survivor, something like Robinson Crusoe meets Lord of the Flies. Abrams came up with Lost.

To shoot the supernatural prime-time soap—about the survivors of a plane crash who find themselves on a magical, mystical, metaphysical island-Abrams tapped his old friend Fong. Of course, Lost became the most-talked-about show in television history. Meanwhile, Abrams and Bad Robot began churning out television series (What About Brian, Fringe, Undercovers, Person of Interest) and big-screen action blockbusters.

One day, while working on Star Trek, Abrams says, he got the idea to do a movie called Super 8, about a group of film-mad middle-school-age kids. Abrams called up Spielberg and asked him to produce. He signed on immediately. Next Abrams called Fong.

"J. J. wanted me to read this script," Fong says. "He had me come to the set of one of his TV shows-they were shooting on location. And he said, 'You can't take the script, you have to read it right here'-you know how top secret he always is. And I'm like, 'Right here? Standing in a park?'

interesting is when I was writing the movie, my mom was diagnosed with brain cancer. In the script, one of the kids has just lost his mom. So it ended up I was writing a movie about losing your mom while I was losing my mom."

Abrams says he and Spielberg labored over the film cut by cut. As Spielberg sees it, "We consciously were trying to recapture the spirit of the Amblin films, not necessarily trying to pay homage."

"It was an homage with a capital H," Abrams says. "It was like going back to my childhood with the person who helped narrate my childhood."

IN HIS OFFICE, ABRAMS IS TALKING about an homage of a different sort—his work on The Force Awakens. The challenge, he says, is to find the right balance, borrowing some from the classics while moving the story along. In that way, he says, the undertaking is not unlike a television series. "It just happens to be a series that George Lucas created that ended up being one of the most culturally impactful things of all time."

Abrams insists the decision to take on the Star Wars franchise—

as director of *The Force Awakens* and executive producer of two sequels—was not easy. He knew that one reason Lucas had decided to sell was the personal attacks he'd suffered over the years from overzealous fans who had their own ideas on how to run a movie dynasty; it just wasn't fun anymore. Kennedy says she had to do a lot of convincing to bring Abrams aboard. "The interesting thing is that our kids—Steven's kids, J. J.'s kids, and mine—all went to the same school. We used to all see one another as we would drop off and pick up the kids or go to school events and things like that. There was a very short list of potential candidates to step into *Star Wars*, and J. J. was way at the top of the list. It's already been talked about that he at first turned it down. I remember having endless conversations with J. J. when he was trying to make the decision. A lot of it happened while we were standing around at school."

When he committed, Abrams went in deep. He persuaded Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, and Mark Hamill to reprise their original

with small servos and motors and skin materials. "When you look at creatures on the set—I have scenes where we might have used a little bit of CG, but it was more likely to *remove* something, not to *add* something, like to remove the puppeteer. There are a couple scenes in this movie where you might think, 'Oh, I bet that's CG,' which is fine, but you're never gonna look at it and go, 'That doesn't look real.'"

It may be a unique feature of our feedback culture that a chubby middle-school *Star Wars* nerd grows up to become the instrument of *Star Wars*' rebirth. It feels freaky even to him.

"I would be disingenuous if I said there weren't hundreds of times during this process of working on this movie where I didn't have a kind of *Oh my God, I'm meeting the Beatles* feeling. It's like, suddenly you're here, finding yourself on the set of the *Millennium Falcon*. It's hard not to feel a reverence toward that, a sense of awe. Every day there would be a moment or two or three where I would





roles as Han Solo, Princess Leia, and Luke Skywalker for the first time in thirty years. (He's also added fresh faces like Adam Driver and Lupita Nyong'o to the mix.) Details about plot and characters have been kept obsessively secret, of course—according to many accounts, the screenplay was still being reworked as shooting began in the spring of 2014—but Abrams has frequently said, as he repeats now, that he's made only sparing use of computer-generated effects. It is as analog as he can make it, shooting on 35mm film (rather than digitally, as almost all movies are shot now) and indulging his longtime fascination with monster makeup and model building.

"When I first saw *Star Wars*, I remember being touched by the tangibility of it. The actuality of it. It just felt real," Abrams says. "I didn't know that the Tatooine shots were done in Tunisia—I just knew I was in a real fucking place, on an actual desert planet. There was an actual sunbaked sandscape, and it was great because it was 100 percent real. It helped me believe that these two droids were really in the middle of the desert arguing and separating, or that this kid from a moisture farm would happen upon this droid in the sandcrawler."

Abrams says his quest for a more tactile, analog film has been well served by the technological advances that have been made

find myself stunned by what was actually happening."

He shakes his head. "It makes no sense that Kathy Kennedy would see an article and that she and Steven Spielberg would decide to trust these priceless original copies of his childhood films, the only copies, to a couple of kids. That makes no sense. Trusting a fifteen-year-old with that stuff? You don't do that. And then the idea that Kathy would become a friend, that Steven would become so close to me. None of it really makes any sense. It doesn't quite feel real. It's like something you make up. I don't know how it ever happened."

TWENTY YEARS OR SO AFTER J. J. Abrams's teacher called his mom to make her aware that he was spending his recess periods flying around the playground in a Superman cape, Carol Abrams ran into the teacher.

"Carol is in a supermarket here in Brentwood and she feels a tap on her shoulder," recalls Gerald Abrams. "She turns around and it's Mrs. Newman. They talk awhile about this and that, and finally Mrs. Newman says, 'Tell me, what ever happened with J. J.?'

"Carol looks at her. 'You're not going to believe it,' she says." 12

Reported Fiction. Charleston, South Carolina.

BY TOM JUNOD June 17, 2015.





THERE WERE TWO CHURCHES, one white and one black, with a parking lot and a playground between them. He parked in the parking lot and wondered which of the churches it belonged to. It was an important distinction for him, the difference between refuge and risk. But it was not as important as the playground—a small, fenced square, deep in the shadow of a shade tree. It had a swing set and one of those plastic climbing cubes, orange, yellow, pink, and blue. He'd loved those cubes when he was a child, because he could never master the swings, he wasn't strong enough for the monkey bars, and all he had to do on a climbing cube was *climb*. He hated the monkey bars, he hated the swings, and he hated the kids who could do them better than he could. Now, though, what he hated most was the possibility that this playground, halfway between the two churches, was shared by them, the white kids and the black kids, the white kids never having a chance. He kept hoping, as he sat in his car, that a child from the black church would start climbing the plastic cube, because he was going to scare the shit out of that kid, he was going to make sure that no child from the black church would play in the playground of the white church ever again. But no child, white or black,

ever came. The playground remained empty, the chains of the swing set stayed straight, and the shadows of the shade tree deepened as the sun sank in the evening sky.

It was well after seven-thirty, and he was late. He was always late—he grew up with his father telling him he was going to be late for his own fucking funeral. He smiled at that now, though he didn't back then. In truth, he had all the time in the world and was as patient as a hunter in a blind. He had parked so that he was facing the black church, and he knew that it was still fat with people. All he had to do ... well, all he had to do was eat his fucking biscuit. He had bought a chicken biscuit on the drive, at Bojangles', and since it was probably going to be the last biscuit he ever ate, he wanted to finish it. The biscuit sat on the passenger seat of his car, a sprawl of crumbs and grease-stained paper, next to his fanny pack. He had kept his fanny pack open on his trip so that every once in a while he could draw courage and resolve from the sight of its gleaming black contents. He zipped it closed now. He chewed his biscuit and counted how many other biscuit wrappers were in his car. He stopped at seventeen, when he saw people stream out of the church, as if the building itself, old and white, venerable, topped by a black steeple, were

a living thing that had just suddenly exhaled.

His father was right: his own fucking funeral. He watched the people scattering on the sidewalk, going to their own cars and their own homes and their own lives, and he felt as though they were running away from him and he, as usual, wasn't fast enough to catch up. He had already finished the chicken, but the last clump of biscuit, which had somehow separated itself from its wrapping, stared at him in mockery and rebuke from the stained upholstery. "Asshole," he heard himself say. Then he saw something that heartened him. The sidewalk in front of the church was as empty now as the playground, but parked along the street, in a place of prominence, was an Impala, the color of red wine, slumped low, with tinted windows and low-profile tires and gold wheels and curb feelers. It let him know someone was still inside, a pimp or a thug, a thug or a pimp, and his heart started again in his chest. He thought of taking the last bite of biscuit, but then decided not to finish. Let the investigators ponder its presence. Let them say he was disciplined enough to leave something behind.

He got out of the car, lifting the fanny pack by its strap, startled, once again, by its weight. He snapped it around his waist and felt it pulling at him, like a child begging not to be abandoned. He had thought, before he went in, that there would be guards, that he would be faced with challenges he would have to surmount, to his everlasting credit. But there was nobody at all, and when he walked from the street and found the door that led to

the church basement, he might as well have been going down a slide.

They were sitting at a round table when he walked in. They were talking and laughing. Then they stopped and turned their heads. The room appeared vast to him but also familiar, wide and low, with a drop ceiling and wood paneling on the walls, its knots a little lurid under the fluorescent lights. The fellowship hall, the room was called, but to him it looked like the rooms he had grown up inwell, the finished basements of the friends well-off enough to live in houses that were not set on slabs and blocks. There were other tables, but they were empty, as though he had chanced upon the aftermath of a party to which he had not been invited, and he had to navigate his way through them, the weight in his fanny pack dragging on him and prodding him at the same time. One of the men sitting at the table stood up as he drew near, smiling and saying, "Wel-come, wel-come," all the while gesturing for him to sit down next to him, in the one open chair. He had no choice but to do what the man asked. He had been received, and he did not need much more than his scant memory of Scripture to think that a place had been prepared for him.

He recognized the man as the pastor, and not just because of the research he had done, the photograph he had studied on the church's Web site. No,

he had one of those *voices*, the kind that always mark their clergymen—deep and rich, theatrical and good-humored and a little self-satisfied, always threatening to break into song; a voice no white man ever owned. "You're just in *time*," the pastor said with a smile. "Normally, we'd all be home by now—but tonight, we had a little meeting before our Bible fellowship, so we're running a little late ourselves. As you can see, we need to address some of the wear-and-tear around here, do a little *up*keep, make some necessary repairs. In the meantime, as we like to say—pardon our progress."

"Sounds like I got lucky," the visitor said as he slid into the empty seat, hearing immediately how flat and twangy his own voice sounded.

"Oh, no, we don't have any 'luck' around here, now," the pastor said, the same smile on his face but with an unnerving focus behind his eyeglasses. "We're a church, so we just say, 'We've been fortunate—'"

"Or we've been blessed," a little girl said, her small and commanding voice shocking the visitor with the realization that there was a child among them. He turned his head and saw her smiling but staring straight ahead, not at him.

"Or we've been blessed," the pastor repeated with a proud smile.

"Well, I guess I must be blessed then," he wanted to say, but he remembered the twang in his voice and decided to keep his goddamn mouth shut. Instead, he looked at the people at the round table, and they looked at him. They were all waiting for something—he couldn't imagine what it could be. Did they want him to introduce himself? To confess his sins? To reveal who he was and what he wanted to do? Did they somehow know...? But he wasn't ready yet. He began wondering what time it was, with the same kind of gnawing anxiety he experienced when he was waiting for texts and e-mails from supposed friends. Windows of pebbled glass lined the walls, so he knew that the sun still lingered in the sky. And yet he needed confirmation of some kind, and when, over the bald head of a thickset man sitting to the pastor's right, he spied a clock over the door to a little ancillary office, a sense



of relief flooded him, the same way it did when he was all alone and finally heard the ping of his phone.

The clock said 4:09. It wasn't broken, it wasn't stopped; its oblivious second hand still whirled around its face. It was just wrong. It was just four hours slow. His black friends, whenever they were late, always joked about "CPT"—but that was just their way of telling him they didn't give a shit. Under the clock, taped to the walls flanking the office door, were construction-paper cutouts in the same bright colors as the plastic cube in the playground; on each

of them a child had written one of the commandments. Thou shalt not... Be Mean. Thou shalt not... Be Mean. Thou shalt not... Be Abully. Thou shalt not... Steal my sandwich. Thou shalt not... Hate. Thou shalt ... Forgive. So they were wrong, too. Everything was. Under his feet, a crack split the length of the fellowship-hall floor, raised like a spine, and already he could not stop feeling for it, his toes like a tongue in the habit of searching out a rotten tooth. It was a reminder that from now on he would have to keep his

own time, and his own counsel. It was a reminder that he was going to have to be better than them, and sit straight, and stop slouching....

He sat up and put his hands on the table, and as soon as he did, he understood: That's what they were waiting for. "Let us put our hands together..." the pastor immediately intoned, in his richest voice, and they all closed their eyes and listened to him. He tried to do the same, so as to remain inconspicuous. But he couldn't. He could never close his eyes when he was supposed to, and now they remained open, with a wary insomniac energy. In truth, he thought of leaving, of slipping back out the door the way he came and finishing his biscuit before the ants in his car did. The people sitting with him wouldn't know and wouldn't care; it would be as if he had never come at all, and next week, or maybe even next year, one of them would say, "Remember that white boy? I wonder what that

was all about." But the woman next to him didn't close her eyes, either. He had seen her when he sat down, and wished that she had gone home early with the rest of them. She was old, and with her silver curls, with her eyeglasses exaggerating the scope of her eyes and making her appear all-seeing, and with her air of patient, motherly concern, she would—no less than the little girl—be a challenge for him. For a long moment, she studied him with the frank appraisal of a schoolteacher; then she smiled, and touched him. She slid her hand toward his so that the outer edges of their pinkies were in contact. "It's all right, child," she said, soothingly, joshingly. "This is a church. You can pray here."

So he closed his eyes and folded his hands, and he tried to pray. He prayed that he wouldn't laugh inappropriately, as he sometimes did when he was nervous, and betray himself by acting like a jackass. He prayed that he would be able to resist them—their blandishments—and remember what he was there for. But mostly, he listened. He was outnumbered, after all, and so now, with his mind swimming in the dark, he listened for their movements, for the sound of them organizing against him. Even with the pastor droning on and on, he was sure that the prayer itself was some kind of subterfuge, and when he opened his eyes, he would find himself surrounded, and they would overwhelm him. As a test of his

courage, he squeezed his eyes shut for as long as he could, but every so often he twisted slightly in his seat, just so he could feel the fanny pack and its reassuring heft.

None of them were standing when finally his eyes flickered open. They were smiling at him, all of them, except for a pretty woman who, crowned by long gold braids, looked at him with skeptical concern, and the little girl, who smiled and, pleased with herself, looked at no one at all. "Welcome back!" the pastor said. "We thought we'd lost you there for a while. I said to myself, I know it's



late—but our guest hasn't fallen asleep, has he?" They all laughed now, as if in relief, and the thickset man with the shiny bald head said, "Looks like you and the Lord got a lot to talk about!" More laughter, deeper this time, and in response he managed a sleepy grin that he hoped wouldn't become a smirk.

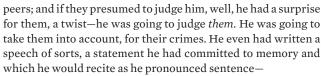
"I'm just tired is all," he said, but when, as a gesture, he allowed his eyelids to droop, it became true. He really was tired, fathomlessly so, and he couldn't help but steal a glance at the clock. 4:20. Had he really kept his eyes closed for five minutes? He felt instinctively for the old woman's motherly hand, but it wasn't there—she was holding hands with a young man sitting next to her, away from him, on the other side. The young man wasn't much older than he was, with a long face, a beard that swaddled his neck like a collar, and a dome of hair poised atop his high shiny forehead. Was he the thug who parked in front of the church? He didn't look like a thug. He was wearing a tie and a white shirt; jeans and new sneakers, with knots that bloomed like flowers. He wasn't tall, but he had big hands, very dark, in which the old woman's were tightly clasped. The young man was smiling, but there was something proprietary in his grip, something defensive, and the sight of his hands entwined with the old woman's made the visitor look at his own.

He never knew what to do with his hands. His father said he had hands like a girl and he was right. They weren't just white; they looked like they had been soaked in water. They were untouched, both by work and by women, and the first few times he had gone to the range he'd left with his hands bleeding, from the nip of the recoil. Now they were there for all to see, stretched out on the green tablecloth like two fillets of fish. They were still greasy from the chicken biscuit and he wished he had washed them. He wished he'd cut his nails, which grew, he swore, in the dark, those nights he was able to sleep. He wished he had taken a shower and he wished he couldn't smell himself and he wished his hair weren't so dirty his scalp hurt. He wished he had changed his shirt, which was his favorite—an exercise in wish fulfillment, it said BORDER PATROL on the front-but which was stained on one sleeve with battery acid and which he had worn for three days straight. The people at the table had all changed before they came and they had all showered and if they smelled of anything at all they smelled of soap and hair oil and perfume and talc, a sweet smell crossed with the mustiness of the basement and the tang of the sea. They had made themselves presentable, and maybe, he thought, if he had done the same they wouldn't find it so easy to laugh at him, and the old woman wouldn't think she could get away with calling him a child, and



her hand would still be touching his.

He counted them once and he counted them again, just to make sure. There were twelve of them, three men, eight women, and a child. At first, he had been disappointed by the turnout. But now it seemed an impossibly lavish harvest. His day had been streaked with hidden significances, with doors opening and closing in a way that made his path irresistible, and surely the number of souls on hand was the most significant fact of all. Twelve: a jury of his peers. Except that they weren't his



But no: The pastor began opening his mouth before he could. "It is such a beautiful night," he said, sweating, beaming. "How about we give praise to the glory of God by lifting our voices in song?"

He would have to wait. It was getting late, but it was also late spring, a few days away from the first day of summer and the longest day of the year, and though shadows pressed the pebbled windows, it was not yet dark outside. He would wait until dark. He would force himself to keep his pale hands on the table rather than risk drawing attention to his fanny pack. He would listen to them sing-as if they were performing for him and him alone, in a bid for more time.

"Brother Ty will lead," the pastor said, "unless-"

They all looked at him now, looked at the visitor.

"Unless our guest has a song he would like us to sing," continued the pastor, with a slight, gracious nod of invitation.

It was the first time he had felt fear since opening the door of the fellowship hall. It was a different kind of fear, though—an older kind of fear, a twinge that had been with him all his life. "Brother Ty?" the pastor said, and the young man stood up and found a red book on a bookshelf set along the wall. He brought it back to the visitor and placed it in front of him, unopened. It was a hymnal. The visitor didn't open it.

"No, sir," he heard himself saving. "No, I don't, sir." "Not a one?"

The visitor shook his head briskly, as if he'd been accused of stealing.

"Well, then, heh-heh, you must be listening to the same radio stations Brother Ty has been listening to," the pastor said with a sly glance toward them both, his smile deepening until his mouth looked like a piece of candy. Then his voice regained its authority. "Brother Ty, just sing something we all know."

Brother Ty leaned over and with one motion opened the hymnal in front of the visitor, and when the visitor saw the name of the song his face grew red. Did they not think he knew it? Did they not think he was Christian?

"Aaa-ah-may-zing..." Brother Ty sang, haltingly, in a plain voice that ached for mastery.

"Oh, yes," the old woman said, and the visitor could see her hand frisking the tabletop, searching for his. But his had fled from the table. They were in his lap, in a fist.

In fact, he didn't know the song past the first line. But then, he didn't need to. The pretty woman with the golden braids opened her mouth and her voice was like another person entering the room



and singing strictly to him. Under his stained shirt the hair rose on his pale arms and behind the mask of his stony face his eyes began to sting. "How sweet the sound!" exclaimed the shinyheaded man, and after warbling a few verses the old woman next to him whispered in his ear: "Sing, child. You know you want to."

He did. He wanted to sing more than anything in the world. Instead he just sat there, with his shoulders raised in a cringing shrug, a stupid squiggle of a smile on his sheepish face. The song passed him by, and yet as it did it

trailed an outstretched hand, and he felt the urge to grab it. What would he say if his lips parted? What would he sing? He feared he would say goodbye. He would say goodbye to his parents, he would say goodbye to his sisters and his friends and anyone who had ever loved him, he would say goodbye to all these people gathered here in the basement of the old church and drift out into the darkness, never to return. But then: the darkness. He saw through the windows that the sun had set and the night had settled in, and even as the sense of loss unleashed by the woman's voice threatened to swallow him whole, he remembered the words he meant to say, and they were not the words of any hymn, or any damned song at all.

You rape our women, and you're taking over the country. And you have to go.

He had repeated those words so many times to himself on his long drive to the church that when he realized he was going to say them out loud, he let go a breath, and the woman who had just stopped singing asked if he was okay.

"Just tired," he said once again, lying this time. "I've come a long way and I've got a long way to go."

Her face softened. "We all do, baby," she said. "We all do."

The clock said 4:41, but it was much, much later than that. The only light fell from the fluorescent lights installed in the low ceiling and they were all hurrying now, they were all in a rush so they could go home by nine. The pastor nodded and they all opened their own book; he nodded again and the little girl began to read. She was about eleven; she wore a yellow dress, with her hair twisted into a complexity of cornrows, and she read as though she won awards for reading, with proud parents looking on. He felt sure that she had written all those commandments taped on the wall. He didn't have a book, so the old woman made room for him with hers and began tracing the verses with her fingers. She must have thought he was too stupid to follow along by himself, but he didn't care anymore. He was repeating his own words in his head, and each iteration was like the tick of a clock tied to a big booming bell.

The little girl was reading from the Gospel of Mark, chapter four, verses sixteen to twenty. His back up against the sea, Jesus of Nazareth had begun to speak to the multitudes, his words, in the old woman's Bible, highlighted in red: And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

It was clear the little girl could have read all night. But she stopped. She was done. The room had grown close with the stillness of nightfall, and the pastor had begun to gleam with sweat. When he began speaking, his voice was even thicker and deeper than before. "Now," he said, "would anyone present care to venture what the Lord is trying to tell us here?"

Nothing. He felt a dozen pairs of eyes upon him and wondered

if they were waiting for him to speak first. If so, they'd be waiting a good long time.

The pastor smiled. "Well, whatever the Lord is telling us, old Brother Mark thought it was worth writing down, so maybe we can do the both of them the favor of trying to figure it out—"

"The Lord is talking about grace!" the little girl said.

"Amazing grace!" the shiny-headed man said.

"'Such as hear the word, and *receive* it,'" the old woman repeated, her finger jabbing the red word *receive* in her Bible, as if for the visitor's eyes and the visitor's eyes alone.

Brother Ty stood up. "What the Lord is saying is that He might be good at giving, but we ain't so good at *getting*. Those people there, listening to Jesus, they must have thought that they were pretty special—they were hearing this man say things *no one* had ever said before. But it's not about hearing it; it's about doing something with it. Your heart is full of thorns? You can't do nothing with it. Your heart's on stony ground? Don't matter *what* someone say to you, even if He's the Lord God Himself. You can't do nothing with it."

He thought that Brother Ty had stood up to go to the bathroom and would leave now that he'd said his piece. But Brother Ty stayed right where he stood and took out his iPhone and began filming them.

The visitor had wondered from the start if they knew they were about to enter history. How could they not, with what was inside his fanny pack, with the power of it? Now he had his answer. They knew not only what he was about but also that they couldn't stop him, and so they were *videotaping* him, for posterity. It was a decision that pleased him.

"Brother Ty makes a good point, as usual," the pastor said, his face evincing fatigue for the first time. "But when Brother Mark wrote down what the Lord said to the multitudes, do you think he was writing for them gathered *there*, by the Sea of Galilee, or for us gathered here, in this very basement? I apologize to our guest tonight for the spotty air-conditioning—this church, old as it is, is a work in progress, just like the rest of us. But I strongly believe—I'll bet my life—that as the Lord God stood there he was speaking to us, right here. He could *see* us. Now, what does our guest think he was saying?"

Brother Ty sat back down, and the visitor watched him grip the old woman's thin arm and kiss her old gray head. His stomach squirmed; he had failed in this kind of situation so many times before. But he wasn't going to fail now. He straightened his back and said, "I don't think the story is about grace, Reverend. I think it's about race."

There was a collective breath, and it hit, almost, a note. The pretty



woman with the gold braids and the beautiful voice turned her face away from him, as if she'd been slapped. The rest of them glanced with concern at the little girl, as if they worried about what she might hear. "You see, I ain't looking to put no one down," he said. "But right there, Jesus is talking to us—the white race. He's saying it's our fault for the mess we've got ourselves into. He gave us everything we needed to run things right, but we haven't been listening because of our love for material things—that's the thorns he's talking about. Now look who's sitting here, talking about his Word: you. That ain't your fault; that's our fault. You been doing that for ages, and we ain't done nothing about it. Well, that shit's got to stop."

Brother Ty stood up again, close to him, over him, but the pastor motioned for him to sit down. "Do you believe in God?" he asked.

"I do," the visitor said.

"Do you believe in one God?" the pastor asked.

"I do."

"So if there's one God, and many, many different peoples, whose God is He?"

"His Chosen People's," the visitor said.

"And who might that be?"

"The people who been building this goddamned civilization for the last two thousand years, pardon my French."

"And those other peoples, those other races—is God with them?" "Well, there's the devil," the visitor said.

"There is," said the pastor, "and he walks among us. But the devil's got no power over God. So why do you think that he's got power over us? Look at us—there are just twelve. But you know what kind of power twelve people have? Well, go ask Jesus. He has something to say about what twelve people can do in this fallen world."

The clock on the wall said it was five minutes to five, but nine bells rang somewhere in the city. The pastor spread his arms and turned his palms to the ceiling. He was trying to end it. He was trying to go home. He said, "We have had a most *unusual* night of fellowship, brothers and sisters, and so now as we say our prayer to be released let's pray for our guest, that God might grant him peace and understanding."

"And safe passage," the little girl said.

"And safe passage." The pastor tried to smile but couldn't. He was breathing heavily now, rapidly, and so was the visitor. They all were, and yet he saw them all, one by one, close their eyes. He did too, for just an instant, and for just an instant he stared at a snapshot of blackest night. He thought again of tiptoeing away, of going back as he had come. Then his toes sought out the crack in the floor and he remembered what he feared the last time he closed his eyes, and what he vowed to do. He opened them with a sudden startled alacrity and stood up, the weight of the fanny pack tugging at him like a barbell.

The old woman recognized him first, her eyes enormous behind her eyeglasses. She patted the seat he had just vacated, asking him to sit back down. "Don't go away angry, child," she said.

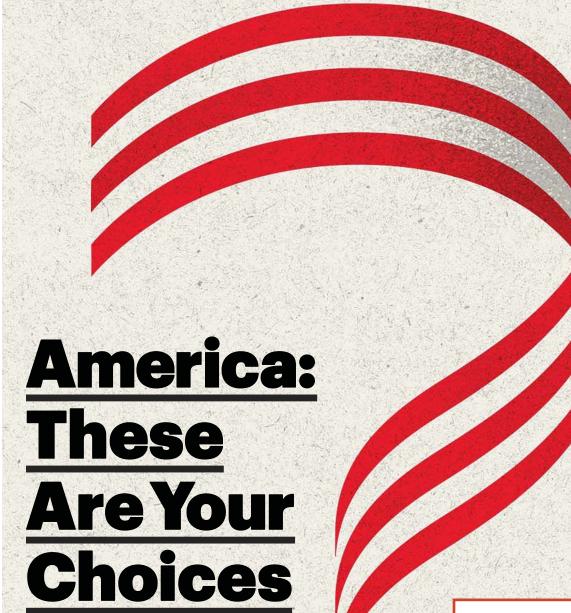
"I'm not angry," he said, without thinking. "I'm happy. I'm as happy as I've ever been in my life."

"Then go on home," she said, steadying him, once again, in his resolve. Didn't she know? Couldn't she see? He was about to do the hardest thing he'd ever done in his life, but it would not be as hard as not doing it, it would not be as hard as going back to who he had always been. "I don't have a home," he said, and opened his hands at his sides, as though already the law had come and told him to drop his weapon. His palms were empty and white as salt, and as he reached back into his fanny pack he saw her eyes brim with sorrow, for him and for the whole fallen world. "Then what are you going to do next?" she asked, even as his pale hand felt around for the certain touch of black metal. "Oh, child, what are you going to do now?" 18

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A HANDFUL OF CHOICES



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Immigrants, educated pg 153 Nowhere, bridges topg 152 Somewhere, tunnels topg 152 Stuckness, inequality andpg 154 Weedpg 160
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*This would be the think tank based in Washington, D. C., that has been a bullshitfree zone of critical inquiry, original research, and public-policy solutions for one hundred years. Home to three hundred experts and thinkers on nearly every topic of national and global import, Brookings is nonpartisan, nonprofit, and all ideas, all the time.

AND WHYS BEHIND THEM.

But first, rtant



You see Hamilton yet? Highly recommended. Raves.

Of course, it makes no sense whatsoever that 211 years after his death, Alexander Hamilton is now the toast of Broadway. But thank God he is at last getting his due, and not a century too soon, either, because those reprobate Jeffersonians had just about stolen history itself and buried the most consequential founder in

permanent obscurity, the founder so resented for his influence that he was the only one of the bunch to be actually murdered, but not before conceiving of and creating the federalism without which we would not be here today. From the original departments of the government to our first ideas of public debt, public investment, and foreign trade, Hamilton thought in terms of making the new country into a world power. A great nation. And good thing, too, because if Jefferson and his ideological heirs had had their way, then today we would have Jefferson's idyllic agrarian burg and the GDP of Congo. No public debt, and no public anything else, for that matter. At its inception, America had a huge choice to make, and our national renewal has depended on huge choices and big bets ever since. As ever, there are always tiny minds and gray faces who mistake themselves for American leaders. And as ever, they must be mocked relentlessly and dealt with accordingly. Nothing is inevitable, least of all good outcomes. Choose one way, create one world. Choose another way and you get a very different world indeed.

And this is precisely where we find ourselves again, with serious choices and big bets to make. That is, if we still have it in us to make a great nation, which seems at times to be an open question. Because whether the new oligarchy created by Citizens United should be allowed to own our political system or not, or whether we should regulate carbon to do something meaningful about climate change or not, or whether we should lower the corporate income tax to make it cheaper to do business here and entice businesses to repatriate trillions of dollars or not—we are the product of our political choices, and we've got fateful choices to make right now. Our choices ought to bind us together rather than absolve us from responsibility for one another, because that's what having a country a commonwealth-means. These are the things that we all own together. Nothing great ever comes from ease, and nothing good ever came from the impulse to not govern, which is currently in vogue. America didn't just happen; we created America by our choices and our civic imagination. Our willingness to think big.

We forget this at our peril: America is not an act of God. America is an act of will. So we here at Esquire are most assuredly pro-choice—in that we believe strongly that we should make them. Without fear, with reliable information (rarer than you might think), and for the common good. Here, presented with our partners from the Brookings Institution, are the biggest choices we face right now.

There's not a ton the United States can do on its own about the Michael Bay movie that the earth is slowly becoming. It's an inconvenient truth, but we account for roughly 16 percent of global carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions-the primary driver of rising global temperatures, according to those who traffic in fact-and our share will only decrease as developing countries' emissions rise. We can use that information to do nothing and let emissions continue to rise unchecked to uncertain (though certainly suboptimal) effect; do a little (and a little is exactly what President Obama, hampered by the not-scientists in Congress, is doing through executive authority); or do a lot, taking the lead in a global effort to reduce emissions through a revolutionary mechanism called a



carbon tax.





Six Things to Know About a Carbon Tax:

"If you're not talking about putting fundamental changes into the market—if you're not talking about pricing carbon—you're not serious about climate change. That really is the fact of the matter. You're not serious." That's the Brookings Institution's Adele Morris, and this is the win-win-win she lays out with a carbon tax: You do a tax of sixteen dollars per ton of carbon dioxide emitted by a business and you would...

- ➤ Raise more than \$2.7 trillion over a twenty-year period, which can be redistributed through the tax code to lowerincome families to offset higher energy costs. Yes, there'd be higher energy costs, but we could also...
- ➤ Reduce the federal budget deficit by about \$815 billion, and...
- ➤ Fund the long-term reduction in corporate tax rates from 35 percent to 28 percent (see below), and...
- ➤ Reduce CO₂ emissions by 9.3 billion tons as companies replace carbon-based energy sources with cheaper, more efficient alternatives, and . . .
- Save upwards of \$322 billion on the environmental and infrastructure damages we won't incur because we're minimizing the impact of climate change, all while...
- ➤ Pressuring other countries to minimize their carbon emissions to compete with the U.S. in the new global energy economy.

Since 2011, twelve U. S. companies have reincorporated as foreign entities to avoid paying U. S. corporate taxes, which are among the highest in the world. Because of these so-called inversions—ten more of which are in progress, and all of which are stunning acts of national disloyalty—we lose not only jobs but also tax revenue. If we lower the corporate tax rate, we could stop the flow of companies overseas and provide incentives for U. S. companies to move the \$2 trillion in assets they're currently holding overseas back to the United States. If we leave rates alone, we watch the bleeding continue.

ILLUSTRATION BY JESSE LENZ



3. SO, UH, ABOUT ALL THESE CRUMBLING BRIDGES?

More specifically: the 147,870 bridges that have been deemed structurally deficient or obsolete, as well as the 570,673 miles of public road in the United States that are now in poor condition.

This critical infrastructure isn't going to pay for itself, and the Department of Transportation says it will take an additional \$24 billion a year to meet the bare minimum needs of maintaining and improving our roads and bridges. Question: Should we take advantage of low gas prices and raise the gas tax [1] for the first time in two decades. which would enable the federal government to distribute more gas-tax revenues to the states so the bridge you take to work won't fall down? Or should we take our chances with the crumbling infrastructure we have? Or should we start thinking bigger?

Shazam the man above to have a look into the future.



If we want to be more than

a bare-minimum nation, we need to build things like the ARC tunnel—things that Brookings scholar Robert Puentes calls "transformative investments." Things like:

[2] E-Highways:

Zero-emission trucking, using an overhead electrified catenary system. Pilot project currently under way between the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

[3] Protected bicycle intersections:

The bike-ification of America continues in Salt Lake City, where, unlike New York City, the bike lanes are protected.

[4] Solar roads:

The big idea: Replace any paved surface-roads, recreational surfaces, tarmac-with interlocking, microprocessing, temperedglass-covered solar panels. Feasibility is in question, but a very big idea indeed. Currently in prototype.

[5] Freight shuttle:

Low-emission freighttransport system being developed in Texas that zips along silently on monorail systems built over highway medians. Would significantly reduce truck traffic, which causes 80 percent of all roadway damage.



[6] Chicago bus lanes:

Simple, revolutionary idea: dedicated bus lanes. Would unclog Chicago by connecting neighborhoods to the Loop, and the West Loop transportation hubs to Michigan Avenue.

[7] Gordie Howe International Crossing:

Unlike Chris Christie, Republican governor Rick Snyder didn't cancel this new bridge to Canada, the busiest crossing with our biggest trade partner. Opens in 2020.

[8] Congestion pricing:

Plan to reengineer traffic in New York City by eliminating non-toll crossings, which would put a stop to congestion caused by toll evaders, and proceeds would rebuild the city's roads and bridges.

[9] Maglev:

Last year the Japanese government offered to finance half the cost of a "maglev" (magnetic levitation) train between Washington and Baltimore, hoping the demonstration effect of that stretch

would incentivize expansion of the fastest trains on earth (311 miles an hour) on up to New York. Congress, currently stuck in the nineteenth century, hasn't been able to come up with the other half.

[10] Ecological highways:

The Mission Zero Corridor, a sixteen-mile stretch of I-85 in Georgia, a pilot project in conservation and pollution remediation—studying ways in which carbon can be absorbed, scrubbed, and repurposed.

4. Should We Limit the Number of Smart People Living in the U.S.?

In 2015 alone, there were 148,000 highly skilled workers who applied for but did not receive H-1B visas, which are designed to make it possible for college graduates with specialized skills to live and work in this country. Many of those workers earn high salaries and work in engineering, computer programming, and other tech-related fields. Do we want more of them working (and paying taxes) in the United States? If so, we need to lift the cap on the number of H-1B visas available every year. If not, we should carry on with the status quo. (We hear it's working out beautifully for everyone.)



f At the very heart of the f American idea is the notion that, UNLIKE IN OTHER PLACES, WE CAN START FROM NOTHING AND THROUGH HARD WORK HAVE EVERYTHING. THAT NOTHING WE CAN IMAGINE IS BEYOND OUR REACH. THAT WE WILL PULL UP STAKES, GO ANYWHERE, DO ANYTHING TO MAKE OUR DREAMS COME TRUE. BUT WHAT IF THAT'S JUST A MYTH? What if the truth is something very different? What if we are...

What does it mean to be an American? Full disclosure: I'm British. Partial defense: I was born on the Fourth of July. I also have made my home here, because I want my teenage sons to feel more American. What does that mean? I don't just mean waving flags and watching football and drinking bad beer. (Okay, yes, the beer is excellent now; otherwise, it would have been a harder migration.) I'm talking about the essence of Americanism. It is a question on which much ink—and blood—has been spent. But I think it can be answered very simply: To be American is to be free to make something of yourself. An everyday phrase that's used to admire another ("She's really made something of herself") or as a proud boast ("I'm a self-made man!"), it also expresses a theological truth. The most important American-manufactured products are Americans themselves. The spirit of self-creation offers a strong and inspiring contrast with English identity, which

BY RICHARD V. REEVES

is based on social class. In my old country, people are supposed to know their place. British people, still constitutionally subjects of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, can say things like "Oh, no, that's not for people like me." Infuriating.

Americans do not know their place in society; they make their place. American social structures and hierarchies are open, fluid, and dynamic. Mobility, not nobility. Or at least that's the theory. Here's President Obama, in his second inaugural address: "We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else because she is an American; she is free, and she is equal, not just in the eyes of God but also in our own."

Politicians of the left in Europe would lament the existence of bleak poverty. Obama instead attacks the idea that a child born to poor parents will inherit their status. "The same chance to succeed as anybody else *because she is an American*...."

Americanism is a unique and powerful cocktail, blending radical egalitarianism (born equal) with fierce individualism (it's up to you): equal parts Thomas Paine and Horatio Alger. Egalitarian individualism is in America's DNA. In his original draft of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote that "men are created equal and independent," a sentiment that remained even though the last two words were ultimately cut. It was a declaration not only of national independence but also of a nation of independents.

The problem lately is not the American Dream in the abstract. It is the growing failure to realize it. Two necessary ingredients of Americanism—meritocracy and momentum—are now sorely lacking. America is stuck.

Almost everywhere you look—at class structures, Congress, the economy, race gaps, residential mobility, even the roads—progress is slowing. *Gridlock* has already become a useful term for political inactivity in Washington, D. C. But it goes much deeper than that. American society itself has become stuck, with weak circulation and mobility across class lines. The economy has lost its postwar dynamism. Racial gaps, illuminated by the burning of churches and urban unrest, stubbornly persist.

In a nation where progress was once unquestioned, stasis threatens. Many Americans I talk to sense that things just aren't moving the way they once were. They are right. Right now this prevailing feeling of stuckness, of limited possibilities and uncertain futures, is fueling a growing contempt for institutions, from the banks and Congress to the media and big business, and a wave of antipolitics on both left and right. It is an impotent anger that has yet to take coherent shape. But even if the American people don't know what to do about it, they know that something is profoundly wrong.

How stuck are we? Let's start with the most important symptom: a lack of social mobility. For all the boasts of meritocracy—only in America!—Americans born at the bottom of the ladder are in fact now less likely to rise to the top than those situated similarly in most other nations, and only half as likely as their Canadian counterparts. The proportion of children born on the bottom rung of the ladder who rise to the top as adults in the U. S. is 7.5 percent—lower than in the UK (9 percent), Denmark (11.7), and Canada (13.5). Horatio Alger has a funny Canadian accent now.

It is not just poverty that is inherited. Affluent Ameri-

cans are solidifying their own status and passing it on to their children more than the affluent in other nations and more than they did in the past. Boys born in 1948 to a highearning father (in the top quarter of wage distribution) had a 33 percent chance of becoming a top earner themselves; for those born in 1980,

56%

THAT'S YOUR CHANCE OF STAY-ING AT THE TOP IF YOU WERE BORN AT (OR NEAR) THE VERY TOP, WE'RE NOT JUST IMMO-BILE AT THE BOTTOM—THERE'S A "GLASS FLOOR" THAT PREVENTS EVEN THE LEAST TALENTED OFFSPRING OF THE AFFLUENT FROM FALLING.

the chance of staying at the top rose sharply to 44 percent, according to calculations by Manhattan Institute economist Scott Winship. The sons of fathers with really high earnings—in the top 5 percent—are much less likely to tumble down the ladder in the U. S. than in Canada (44 percent versus 59 percent). A "glass floor" prevents even the least talented offspring of the affluent from falling. There is a blockage in the circulation of the American elite as well, a system-wide hardening of the arteries.

Exhibit A in the case against the American political elites: the U. S. tax code. To call it Byzantine is an insult to medieval Roman administrative prowess. There is one good reason for this complexity: The American tax system is a major instrument of social policy, especially in terms of tax credits to lower-income families, health-care subsidies, incentives for retirement savings, and so on. But there are plenty of bad reasons, too—above all, the billions of dollars' worth of breaks and exceptions resulting from lobbying efforts by the very people the tax system favors.

The American system is also a weak reed when it comes to redistribution. You will have read and heard many times that the United States is one of the most unequal nations in the world. That is true, but only after the impact of taxes and benefits is taken into account. What economists call "market inequality," which exists before any government intervention at all, is much lower—in fact it's about the same as in Germany and France. There is a lot going on under the hood here, but the key point is clear enough: America is unequal because American policy moves less money from rich to poor. Inequality is not fate or an act of nature. Inequality is a choice.

These are facts that should shock America into action. For a nation organized principally around the ideas of opportunity and openness, social stickiness of this order amounts to an existential threat. Although political leaders declare their dedication to openness, the hard issues raised by social inertia are receiving insufficient attention in terms of actual policy solutions. Most American politicians remain cheerleaders for the American Dream, merely offering loud encouragement from the sidelines, as if that were their role. So fragile is the American political ego that we can't go five minutes without congratulating ourselves on the greatness of our system, yet policy choices exacerbate stuckness and ensure decline.

In Britain (where stickiness has historically been an accepted

social condition), by contrast, the issues of social mobility and class stickiness have risen to the top of the political and policy agenda. In the previous UK government (in which I served as director of strategy to Nick Clegg, the deputy prime minister), we devoted whole Cabinet meetings to the

7 out of **10**

BLACK KIDS RAISED IN MIDDLE-INCOME HOMES WILL END UP DOING WORSE AS ADULTS.



problems of intergenerational mobility and the development of a new national strategy. (One result has been a dramatic expansion in pre-K education and care:

Every three- and four-year-old will soon be entitled to thirty hours a week for free.) Many of the Cabinet members were schooled at the nation's finest private high schools. A few had hereditary titles. But they pored over data and argued over remedies-posh people worrying over intergenerational income quintiles.

Why is social mobility a hotter topic in the old country? Here is my theory: Brits are acutely aware that they live in a class-divided society. Cues and clues of accent, dress, education, and comportment are constantly calibrated. But this awareness increases political pressure to reduce these divisions. In America, by contrast, the myth of classlessness stands in the way of progress. The everyday folksiness of Americans-which, to be clear, I love-serves as a social camouflage for deep economic inequality. Americans tell themselves and one another that they live in a classless land of open opportunity. But it is starting to ring hollow, isn't it?

For black Americans, claims of equal opportunity have, of course, been false from the founding. They remain

• false today. The chances of being stuck in poverty are far, far greater for black kids. Half of those born on the bottom rung of the income ladder (the bottom fifth) will stay there as adults. Perhaps even more disturbing, seven out of ten black kids raised in middle-income homes (i.e., the middle fifth) will end up lower down as adults. A boy who grows up in Baltimore will earn 28 percent less simply because he grew up in Baltimore: In other words, this supersedes all other factors. Sixty-six percent of black chil-

dren live in America's poorest neighborhoods, compared with six percent of white children.

Recent events have shone a light on the black experience in dozens of U.S. cities.

Behind the riots and the rage, the statistics tell a simple, damn-

ing story. Progress toward equality for black Americans has essentially halted. The average black family has an income that is 59 percent of the average white family's, down from 65 percent in 2000. In the job

market, race gaps are immobile, too. In the 1950s, black Americans were twice as likely to be unemployed as whites. And today? Still twice as likely.

\$11,000

OF THE AVERAGE BLACK **FAMILY. IN NATIONAL**

ECONOMIC TERMS. BLACK WEALTH IS ESSEN-

TIALLY NONEXISTENT.

Race gaps in wealth are perhaps the most striking of all. The average white household is now thirteen times wealthier than the average black one. This is the widest gap in a quarter of a century. The recession hit families of all races, but it resulted in a wealth wipeout for black families. In 2007, the average black family had a net worth of \$19,200, almost entirely in housing stock, typically at the cheap, fragile end of the market. By 2010, this had fallen to \$16,600. By 2013-by which point white wealth levels had started to recover-it was down to \$11,000. In national economic terms, black wealth is now essentially nonexistent.

Half a century after the passing of the Civil Rights Act, the arc of history is no longer bending toward justice. A few years ago, it was reasonable to hope that changing attitudes, increasing education,

> and a growing economy would surely, if slowly, bring black America and white America closer together. No longer. America is stuck.

> The economy is also getting stuck. Labor productivity growth, measured as growth in output per hour, has averaged 1.6 percent since 1973. Male earning power is flatlining. In 2014, the median full-time male wage was \$50,000, down from \$53,000 in 1973 (in the dollar equivalent of 2014). Capital is be-

ing hoarded rather than invested in the businesses of the future. U.S. corporations have almost \$1.5 trillion sitting on their balance sheets, and many are busily buying up their own stock. But capital expenditure lags, hindering the economic recovery.

New-business creation and entrepreneurial activity are declin-

THAT'S THE PERCENTAGE OF ALL BUSINESSES THAT ARE LESS THAN A YEAR **OLD. DOWN FROM 15** PERCENT IN THE LATE 1970s—THE HALLMARK OF "A STEADY, SECULAR **DECLINE IN BUSINESS** DYNAMISM.



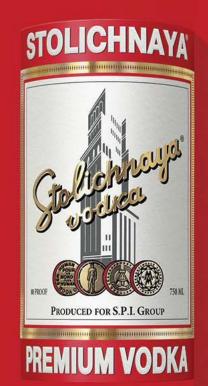
HORATIO ALGER NOW HAS A CANADIAN ACCENT: THE PROPORTION OF CHILDREN BORN ON THE BOTTOM RUNG OF THE LADDER WHO RISE TO THE TOP AS ADULTS IN THE U.S. IS 7.5 PERCENT—LOWER THAN THAT IN THE UK (9 PERCENT), DENMARK (11.7), AND CANADA (13.5).

THE VODKA WITH OVER 80 YEARS OF SECRETS.











ing, too. As economist Robert Litan has shown, the proportion of "baby businesses" (firms less than a year old) has almost halved since the late

1970s, decreasing from 15 percent to 8 percent—the hallmark of "a steady, secular decline in business dynamism." It is significant that this downward trend set in long before

the Great Recession hit. There is less movement between jobs as well, another symptom of declining economic vigor.

Americans are settling behind their desks-and also into their

Immigrants ARE NOW TWICE AS LIKELY TO START A NEW BUSINESS AS NATIVE-BORN AMERICANS. NEW AMERICANS ARE TRUE AMERICANS. WE NEED A

LOT MORE OF THEM.

neighborhoods. The proportion of American adults moving house each year has decreased by almost half since the postwar years, to around 12 percent. Longdistance moves across state lines have as well. This is partly due to technological advances, which have weakened the link between location and job prospects, and partly to the growth of economic diversity in cities; there are few "one industry"

towns today. But it is also due to a less vibrant housing market, slower rates of new business creation, and a lessening in Americans' appetite for dis-

ruption, change, and risk.

This geographic settling is at odds with historic American geographic mobility. From heeding the call "Go west, young man" to loading up the U-Haul in search of a better job, the instinctive restlessness of America has always matched skills to work, people to opportunities, labor to capital. Rather than waiting for help from the government, or for the economic tide to turn back in their favor, millions of Americans changed their life prospects by changing their address. Now they are more likely to stay put and wait. Others, especially black Americans, are unable to escape the poor neighborhoods of their childhood. They are, as the title of an influential book by sociologist Patrick Sharkey puts it, Stuck in Place.

There are everyday symptoms of stuckness, too. Take transport. In 2014, Americans collectively spent almost seven billion hours stuck motionless in traffic—that's a couple days each. The roads get more jammed every year. But money for infrastructure improvements is stuck in a failing road fund, and the railophobia of politicians hampers investment in public transport.

Whose job is it to do something about this? The most visible symptom of our disease is the glue slowly hardening in the machinery of national government. The last two Congresses have been the least productive in history by almost any measure cho-

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THAT'S THE PERCENTAGE OF US MOVING EVERY YEAR, ABOUT HALF WHAT IT WAS AFTER WORLD WAR II. LONG-DISTANCE MOVES ACROSS STATE LINES ALSO HAVE BEEN CUT IN HALF. WE DON'T HAVE MUCH OF AN APPETITE FOR RISK ANYMORE.

sen, just when we need them to be the most productive. The U.S. political system, with its strong separation among competing centers of power, relies on a spirit of cross-party compromise and trust in order to work. Good luck there.

So what is to be done? As with anything, the first step is to admit the problem. Americans have to stop convincing themselves they live in a society of opportunity. It is a painful admission, of course, especially for the most successful. The most fervent believers in meritocracy are naturally those who have enjoyed success. It is hard to acknowledge the role of good fortune, including the lottery of birth, when describing your own path to greatness.

There is a general reckoning needed. In the golden years following World War II, the economy grew at 4 percent per annum and wages surged. Wealth accumulated. The federal government, at the zenith of its powers, built interstates and the welfare system, sent GIs to college and men to the moon. But here's the thing: Those days are gone, and they're not coming back. Opportunity and growth will no lon-

> ger be delivered, almost automatically, by a buoyant and largely unchallenged economy. Now it will take work.

> The future success of the American idea must now be intentional.

> There are plenty of ideas for reform that simply require will and a functioning political system. At the heart of them is the determination to think big again and to vigorously engage in public investment. And we need to put money into future generations like our lives depended on it, because they do: Access to affordable, effective contraception dramatically cuts rates of unplanned pregnancy and gives kids a better start in life. Done well, pre-K education closes learning gaps and prepares children for school. More generous income benefits stabilize homes and help kids. Reading programs for new parents improve literacy levels. Strong school principals attract good teachers and raise standards. College coaches help get nontraditional students to and through college. And so on. We are not lacking ideas. We are lacking a necessary sense of political urgency. We are stuck.

But we can move again if we choose.

In addition to a rejuvenation of policy in all these fields, there are two big shifts required for an American twenty-first-century renaissance: becoming open to more immigration and shifting power from Washington to the cities.

America needs another wave of immigration. This is in part just basic math: We need more young workers to fund the old age of the baby boomers. But there is [continued on page 170]

THE CHANCES OF BEING STUCK IN POVERTY ARE FAR, **FAR GREATER FOR BLACK** KIDS. HALF OF THOSE BORN ON THE BOTTOM RUNG OF THE INCOME LADDER (THE BOTTOM FIFTH) WILL



The best seats in the house are no longer in your house. Welcome to the front row. Or, would you prefer to be right up there onstage?

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THE FEELING STAYS WITH YOU.





5. WEED, EVERYONE?

There are the Americans who live in the four states (plus D. C.) that allow recreational marijuana use, and there are the Americans who live in the nineteen states that allow medical marijuana use. Then there are the Americans who live in the other states, where it may or may not be a crime to possess marijuana in any quantity for any reason. For the purposes of federal regulation, law enforcement, and all-around sanity, all Americans deserve some clarity on the legality of marijuana, and the choices, as we see them, are:

The Way Things Are:

We continue prohibition on the federal level-in 2012, almost seven thousand people were convicted in federal courts for marijuana offenses, more than for any other type of drug—and allow a patchwork of state laws to govern recreational and medical marijuana use. According to the ACLU, of the 8.2 million marijuana arrests between 2001 and 2010, 88 percent were for simply having marijuana, and blacks are 3.7 times as likely as whites to be arrested for possession even though

they're no more likely to consume it.

The Way Things Could Be:

We legalize, tax, and regulate marijuana in all fifty states, making what Brookings scholar John Hudak calls "an aboveground, whitemarket economic impact. People are going to start paying taxes on it. People are going to start working in industries that previously were underground. That means if they're regulated

and they're regulated properly, those markets will probably function more effectively and more efficiently." This would not have a huge impact on the prison population, since most people arrested for possession aren't charged with felony crimes. However, we would save and/ or redistribute \$13.7 billion of federal and state expenditures (including policing and prosecuting), and we would raise \$6.4 billion every year in taxes that could then be directed to fund health and addiction services.

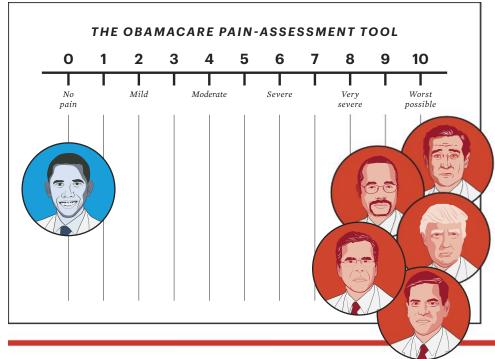
6. Should We **Give Every**one a Good Lawyer?

We have a constitutional right to an attorney. The Supreme Court tells us so. Every cop show evertells us so. And a lot of us need one: Anywhere from 60 to 90 percent of criminal defendants rely on public defenders. The only hitch is that there aren't enough of them, with some studies estimating it would take up to 6,900 additional public defenders to handle the current caseload. Higherquality public defenders can investigate and bring to light systemic biases and inequalities that undermine everything from policing to prisons, and higher-quality representation for everyone would result in a justice system actually worthy of the name.

YES, THIS AGAIN.

7. SHOULD WE REPEAL AND REPLACE OBAMACARE?

We wouldn't bring it up, really, but the House of Representatives has voted more than fifty times to repeal the Affordable Care Act, and the Senate tried and failed to pass a similar measure this past summer. With each and every one of the Republican candidates for president vowing to repeal and replace Obamacare ("with something terrific," in Donald Trump's case), and with Republicans all but certain to maintain control of both houses of Congress through 2018 at least, there's a good chance that this dog might actually catch the car.



The Status Quo:

We continue with the Affordable Care Act; the eighteen million people who have gained insurance through the ACA since October 2013, when enrollment opened, would continue to receive benefits through private insurance exchanges and expanded access to Medicaid.

Or "Repeal and Replace":

According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, repealing the ACA would increase federal budget deficits by \$137 billion between 2016 and 2025 (mostly because the cost-saving measures enacted by the ACA would be scrapped).

If we eliminate the provision that extends coverage of children up to the age of twenty-six, 2.3 million young adults between the ages of nineteen and twenty-five who gained coverage due to this provision would stand to lose coverage.

If we eliminate the ACA's prohibition on preexisting-condition exclusions, fifty million Americans with preexisting conditions could again be denied access from insurers.

If we eliminate the individual mandate, eight to twenty-four million fewer people (a majority of them on the younger and healthier end of the spectrum) would purchase health insurance, and since their relative healthiness wouldn't help offset the costs of covering older, sicker patients, the average cost of premiums would rise 10 to 27 percent.

8. Should It Be
Illegal to Buy a
Gun Without
a Background
Check?

While Congress cowers, an interesting thing has been happening at the grassroots level—an earnest effort by gun owners to close the personal-sales loophole, which allows a person to sell a gun, any gun, to a stranger and bypass the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), which covers every other gun sale in the country. Lots of numbers are tossed around by all sides, but these, from the CDC, paint

a stark picture: In 2013, there were 32,383 firearm murders or suicides in America. Of those, fewer than 300 were deemed justifiable. Which is to say, if you have and use a gun, you are about 100 times as likely to murder someone or kill yourself as to defend yourself or your family, and those numbers are higher if you're a man. So if you buy a gun off the Internet, should you have a NICS check done just as if you were buying a gun from a licensed dealer?



<u>Billionaires,</u>

THE PROGRESSIVES AND TRUST BUSTERS OF A CENTURY AGO **ROSE UP AGAINST CONCENTRATED POWER AS A** MORTAL THREAT TO DEMOCRACY ITSELF. WE, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAVE UNCONDITIONALLY SURRENDERED.

BY JOHN H. RICHARDSON



THE GREAT

Blue Whale, the liberal billionaire, feared to be

mythical, certainly rare enough to qualify for EPA protection, has a floor of offices in downtown San Francisco in the same old building where Sam Spade searched for the Maltese Falcon. This is where the supplicants come: senators, governors, presidential candidates and their harried fundraisers. Like actors in a Shakespearean comedy, they humiliate themselves with bowing and scraping, flattery and cajoling and outright begging and their obvious desperation to keep up with the Republicans—the Republicans, damn them, who don't have to work nearly as hard or as grudgingly at the care and feeding of billionaires. And after all their pilgrimages, the liberal fundraisers discover that liberal billionaires are cheap. They prefer the moral glory of curing malaria in Africa to the nasty grind of retail politics. They require more personal visits, more sweet talk about how important they are and what a big difference their contribution will make, and they're much more transactional than the Republicans. They want to know exactly what their contribution will get them, and then, after all that, they might give you \$100,000. Or nothing at all.

This is life in the world left



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is made with superior Jefferson's bourbon and a combination of the finest sweet and dry vermouth and bitters. Crafted with the editors of Esquire and barrel-aged for 90 days, the result is a damn good cocktail. Serve it up or on the rocks. No labor or equipment needed.



by Citizens United, where unlimited new sums of money allowed by the Supreme Court concentrate power in

a way the robber barons could have only dreamed. Read it and weep:

A solid majority of Americans accept the scientific consensus that fossil fuels are changing the climate, and solid majorities support Social Security and Medicare, public education, public spending on health care, higher taxes on the rich, regulations on Wall Street, and even increased regulation on guns. So why don't Americans get a government of the people?

Because it costs money. And billionaires, even the Great Blue Whales, hate tax increases. As Brookings Institution scholar Darrell M. West points out in his alarming new book, Billionaires: Reflections on the Upper Crust, the same is true all over the world. "Liberal and conservative billionaires often are united in opposing tax increases, at least for themselves." So instead we talk about small government.

There are 536 billionaires in America, and The New York Times recently reported that fully half of the money in the presidential race so far has come from just 158 families, most of them with fortunes in fossil fuels and finance, most of them funding Republicans. In the 2016 cycle, the Koch brothers alone will spend \$900 million. Casino magnate Sheldon Adelson spent more than

\$100 million in 2012 and will likely spend more. It's hard to get your mind around how much money this is. Mitt Romney's super PAC raised \$12 million four years ago in the same reporting period that Jeb Bush raised more than \$100 million. And this year's haul doesn't even begin to count all the "foundations" and "grassroots groups" and the dark money made legal by the Supreme Court that nobody can track.

Tom Steyer is apologetic about all this. A relaxed but very focused man of fifty-eight, dressed in a suit with one of his eight trademark ugly plaid ties, he's a liberal billionaire who is somewhat famous for flying commercial-in economy, no less-and driving an old hybrid Honda he bought used. He never wanted to be a Great Blue Whale.

"Citizens United was a terrible decision," he says, "just a terrible decision. And we understand the irony that we're using a lot of money in politics, whereas in fact we don't believe that that's the right thing to have happen in general, and I would say



two things: One, this is the law of the United States put down by the Supreme Court of the United States. Those are the rules of the game. So we do what we can to mitigate the things that we think are the most egregious about it, and we try-and it's shockingly hard to do-to make sure that we don't have a conflict."

Stever has long liberal roots—his mother worked for NBC News and taught in Harlem, his wife has tattoos and a sustainable farm—but he spent his years quietly working at his hedge fund and earning a great fortune. He made regular, generous donations to the Democratic party and that was enough politics for him.

"Generally, our system works pretty well," he explains. "If you read the press, you might not think it works pretty well, but actually, when there's a big problem in the United States of America we basically go through a kind of Socratic, somewhat combative process about what the right way to solve it is, and then we actually do solve it. Democrats solve it and Republicans

9. Should We Let Billionaires Buy Elections?

For the 2016 cycle, the Koch brothers alone HAVE VOWED TO SPEND ALMOST \$1 BILLION TO INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME. Casino magnate Sheldon Adelson Spent More than \$100 million in 2012 and will likely spend more. THAT'S JUST THREE GUYS. What are they paying for?





solve it. We come up with the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act and we invent the EPA and we don't wait for Chernobyl. So when I started reading about cli-

mate along with everybody else, I thought, 'Fine! Good to go! We now know there's a problem."

His optimism that "the system" would respond as it had in the past began to falter around 2005. "It started to seem like Whoa, this one's not going right. And it's a big problem." Still thinking technology could fix it, he donated a fortune to Stanford University for energy research, making a bet on democracy and innovation. Since Steyer made much of his fortune in coal, he quit his hedge fund and sold his holdings in coal, even turned his solar investments over to an arm's-length foundation.

Then the Supreme Court unleashed the big money and his faith in democracy began to falter.



AFTER THE SUPREME COURT ruled on Citizens *United* in 2010, the right-wing billionaires saw the implications immediately. "They saw that it was a way to level the playing field," says a top Demo-

cratic fundraiser. "With changing demographics in the country going against them, the one advantage they have is money. And they're willing to pony up a lot more, so we've had this tidal wave of money coming in to the other side."

While the liberals waffled, the right-wing billionaires went to war. "Our side feels that getting involved in state legislative battles is beneath them," says another Democratic fundraiser. "So what happens? The Republican donors, the Koch brothers, invest deeply in state races and flip state legislatures, which control redistricting, which controls who owns Congress." In Ohio, for example, despite a dead heat in the electorate, Republicans now have twelve congressional seats and Democrats have just four. In North Carolina, a discount-store tycoon named Art Pope bought himself a docile state legislature that eliminated teacher tenure, passed voter-ID laws, and cut back on early voting. The same is true all over the country. "They've picked up nine hundred state legislative seats just since 2010," the first Democratic fundraiser says. "I think thirty state chambers have been flipped. It's overwhelming. There's no way for Democrats to keep up."

So control of the states gave the right-wing billionaires control of the 2012 "redistricting" that bunched Democratic votes into a handful of crazy-quilt congressional districts, which in turn has given Republicans a near-permanent majority in the House of Representatives. But they also got power over many secretaries of state, who are decision makers on state electionsconsider Alabama's John Merrill, elected with heavy contributions from a group affiliated with the National Association of Manufacturers, who, after lawmakers toughened up ID requirements for voting, defended the shutting down of driver'slicense offices in eight of the top ten counties with the highest percentage of black voters.

As West puts it in Billionaires, "Wealthy donors push candidates to the extremes, especially on the Republican side."

During this critical transitional period, Steyer was getting his baptism in practical politics. He began in 2010 with a local fight against Proposition 23 in California. This was an attempt by the Koch brothers and their fossil-fuel allies to gut California's rules on air pollution and boost their bottom line. Steyer

These days, WHEN MONEY HAS BEEN LEGALLY FOUND TO EQUAL SPEECH, how much speech can you afford? Even if it's to support a cause or candidate you find worthy, should **ANYONE HAVE THAT KIND**

OF POWER?

joined with George Shultz, Ronald Reagan's former secretary of state, investing \$5 million in the cause. They didn't want to turn the battle into Billionaire vs. Billionaires or Environmentalist Against Oil Companies, so they focused on the concerns of ordinary people. "People care about what's local and human. So that means they care a lot about the impact on jobs. And we could make a very strong and true argument that clean energy was gonna be a job producer in the state of California, and there would be good-paying jobs," Steyer says.

Health was another day-to-day concern. California has five million people with asthma, including almost a million kids, and dirty air is the kind of issue that gets people off the sofa.

Finally, their opponents were "oil refiners from out of state trying to benefit by getting rid of pollution laws"-not exactly sympathetic figures.

Steyer's strategies worked—Prop 23 was defeated by a 23-point margin. Meanwhile, the impact of the Supreme Court's decisions on money and speech was becoming more vivid by the day. Billionaires were starting to donate vast sums to "nonprofit" 501(c)(4)'s and 501(c)(6)'s, the so-called dark-money vehicles that aren't required to disclose their donors. Transparency is one of the few remaining checks on the power of money, as West repeatedly points out in Billionaires, but Republicans have blocked all efforts by Democrats to pass a "Disclose Act" to reveal the names behind the "speech." And now the money is flowing to even smaller races—local judges, city councils, and even school superintendents. In California in 2014, billionaires who favor charter schools poured more than \$10 million into a charter-friendly candidate named Marshall Tuck, making his the most expensive race in the state. Last year in Colorado, the Koch brothers put \$350,000 into a school board that fought the teachers' unions and started a private-school voucher program. Even the cynicism all this money fuels is a fringe benefit for the billionaires: The less people believe in politics, the less they participate, and the less they participate, the more likely the billionaires will get their way.

For all these reasons, the old consolation that money can't buy a president simply isn't true anymore. "If you can control that many congressional districts, you control turnout operations," the top Democratic fundraiser points out. "At what point does the ground game start to affect the White House? Is there a way forward to fix this system, or are we past the point of no return?"



AS IT HAPPENS, 2010 was also the year that "cap and trade" went down in Congress. This was famously bipartisan, market-friendly climate legislation that had the support of John McCain and Lind-

sey Graham but became toxic, almost overnight, with the rise of the Tea Party. Contemplating this from the perspective of his victory on Prop 23, Steyer was especially struck by an influential study by Harvard political scientist Theda Skocpol called "Naming the Problem: What It Will Take to Counter Extremism and Engage Americans in the Fight Against Global Warming." Skocpol argued that national climate activists put too much trust in the political system and failed to grasp the growing radicalization of Republican politicians. "Ever since global warming became prominent on the environmental agenda, an all-out political fight has been under way, and reformers do themselves no favor by refusing to clearly understand the scope of the battle or the degree to which politicians, including almost all Republicans now in office, have been recruited into the opposition." Public opinion no longer mattered. Science no longer mattered. The new game was using "institutional levers" like the filibuster and the senatorial hold "to stymie or undermine governmental measures."

The short version: Reformers were still living in the America that existed before big money. The only alternative was giving up on "elite maneuvers" and finding ways to arouse the public.

"I felt as if it wasn't something I had thought about before," Steyer says now.

So Steyer began his transformation into a Great Blue Whale, launching himself into the frustrating, thankless, incremental world of retail politics. But he is still a billionaire in the age of billionaires, and billionaires care most about their pet issues, so this transformation had a modern twist—he also began to set up what amounts to his own political party, a climate party.

He started with a network of business groups in about thirty key states. Cannier than traditional activists and still more invested in the old idea of America, he insisted on keeping his groups as bipartisan as possible. "We want fossil-fuel companies, who have great expertise in energy, to be a constructive part of the solution," he says. In 2013, he invited Hank Paulson, the former treasury secretary and head of Goldman Sachs, to join Mike Bloomberg on a business-analysis project called Risky Business, and they concluded that within thirty-five years Florida will face \$23 billion in property losses alone because of rising sea levels. He also started spending his money on specific races, fighting oil-and-coal-friendly candidates in Massachusetts and Virginia in 2013 and in seven more statewide races in 2014, including the doomed battle to unseat Rick Scott in Florida. He lost about half of them.

"We definitely were disappointed about Rick Scott," Steyer says now. "I thought the governor's race in Florida was probably the most important race in the United States in 2014. But there was a horrible Democratic turnout in 2014."

It turns out that there's only so much a single billionaire can do. But Steyer knew what he was up against.

"Here's how I think about those races—if we look at what we did, look at the places where we were and the places where we weren't, we could see we really moved people on climate. No question about that. I'd say something else, too—no one remembers that President Obama ran on 'clean coal and all of the above' three years ago. That was his mantra. He was not saying what he's saying now. He understood what he's saying now, but politically the country had to change. What he said to us is 'Make it possible for me to do what I want.' So when I think about 2014, I think an election is a great way to have a conversation."

To an outsider, his optimism might seem naive. What about the impact of those Supreme Court decisions, the nine hundred state legislative seats and thirty governorships?

"Twenty-nine," he says. "But who's counting?"

But how can he even begin to compete? Especially since he hasn't been able to convince a single other liberal billionaire to join him? Where's Sergey Brin? Where's Bill Gates?

Steyer grins. "Can I help you with phone numbers?"



STEYER'S GREATEST PASSION is for his version of the Tea Party, NextGen Climate. Three members of his political team sit down in a local coffee shop to detail their strategies. In Iowa, for example, they

have ten paid field directors and another sixty staff and college students on the payroll. They're aiming first at "grass tops" efforts to get political activists, small-business owners, and ministers involved. "Validators," they call them. Second, they're focusing on younger people in cities and colleges. Already they've signed up more than eleven thousand people, asking each of them to take some kind of action. "In the last thirty days, we had 558 unique volunteers doing something," says a political staffer, an enthusiastic, bearded twenty-six-year-old. "That's more than any of the candidates."

River cleanups? Viral videos? Concert tours? In the face of climate change, these slow-moving grassroots efforts seem downright pitiful. And the Republicans are playing hardball as usual, putting their money into new political innovations like the recent fad for "tracking operations," where propagandists like James O'Keefe and the Center for Medical Progress stalk groups they oppose with cameras and use devious editing techniques to turn innocence into guilt. Or they use the hidden levers of government to get their way, like the "one senator" strategy, whereby a

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single U.S. senator can be induced to put a bill on indefinite hold—Rand Paul, for example, has blocked for years any attempt to uncover the names of wealthy Ameri-

cans who are hiding billions in secret Swiss bank accounts. The beautiful libertarian ideals of small government and personal freedom, promoted through front groups like the Cato Institute, turn out to be effective ways for big money to set the agenda and suppress the popular will.

So back in Steyer's offices, even more than before, it's hard to avoid the disconcerting idea that America's fate is being decided by giant stomping creatures who barely notice the delicate bones beneath their feet.

"I totally agree," Steyer says.

And the rising power of money is a global phenomenon, as West points out in *Billionaires*, and the billionaires are almost completely unified in their determination to shrink the governments that might be able to fight the problem. So how is one more billionaire's pet project going to make any difference?

At this, Steyer finally grows a little frustrated. "Our plan to have 50 percent clean energy by 2030—over *half of Republicans* support that. Sixty-nine percent of independents support that. So the country has moved on this. Millennials are into this more than anybody else. They know it's their problem."

But it still comes down to Billionaire vs. Billionaires. Or One Billionaire + a Bunch of College Kids vs. the U. S. Superwealthy, Whose Assets Have Doubled Over the Past Ten Years from \$1 Trillion to \$2 Trillion.

"I make two points. The first one is about inequality. Obviously the United States has never had this level of inequality, certainly not in a really, really long time. And I think it's really unhealthy for the country. It's not good economically; it's also not good from the point of view of someone who loves democracy. It's not right. I've looked at the numbers and it's pretty shocking. And one of the big threats to America is the fact that people don't feel that the system's working for them. They feel like the money's stolen our system. And you don't have to be a genius to know that people everywhere feel that way. I feel that way, too. So lower taxes, that's not something we're pushing for. Because we have a gigantic job in front of us, which really is about climate and growth and how are we going to have some form of just society. And our ability to restore the Amer-

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The Roberts Court, in its infinitesimal wisdom, made the Citizens United decision damn near bulletproof, so we'll have to restore order the hard way.

Hear that, two thirds of the states?

ican dream is gonna be driven by how we react to energy. Even though it seems like it's a separate issue, it's at the heart of every issue. When I think about putting Americans to work at decent-paying jobs that you can live on in dignity, I think about this. Climate is the fundamental issue at the heart of our economics and our ability to have a sustainable American dream. That's what I think."

And so, the Great Blue Whale finds himself in the role of retail political organizer. When you're up against opponents with the spending power of a million families, the only thing big enough to respond is, well, a million families. The real citizens united. That's the power Stever is trying to harness.

"If this is David and Goliath," Steyer admits, "we're definitely the David. The other side is much bigger and richer, and is spending a lot more money. But we have truth on our side."

In the coming year, for the first time in American history, we will find out, in market terms, just what the truth is worth.

10. Should We Make America Great Again?

All depends, kemosabes. Whereas most stupid suppositions are undone by one fatal flaw in logic, this one comes equipped with two: One, that America isn't already pretty great (ask the eleven million undocumented immigrants who risked everything to come here, or the two billion-

plus people around the world who've never cast a meaningful vote in their lives, if America's great or not), and two, that what's great for one group of Americans is necessarily great for another. We should, by all means, endeavor to make things great for those Americans who've seen their income rise meaningfully over the past decade, and who enjoy equal (if not enhanced) protection under the law, and who, come to think of it, already have things pretty good (even if for some reason they think they don't). But let's also try to make things great for those communities and individuals for whom our promises of life, liberty, et al. are ringing increasingly empty. Greatness for anyone, much less for all, isn't, or shouldn't be, a matter of fate. And it's not a given, either. It's a... what is that, you say? Yeah, it's a choice.





Stuck

[continued from page 158] more to it than that. Immigrants also provide a shot in the arm to American vitality itself. Always have, always will. Immigrants are now twice as likely to start a new business as native-born Americans. Rates of entrepreneurialism are declining among natives but rising among immigrants.

Immigrant children show extraordinary upward-mobility rates, shooting up the income-distribution ladder like rockets, yet by the third or fourth generation, the rates go down, reflecting indigenous norms. Among children born in Los Angeles to poorly educated Chinese immigrants, for example, an astonishing 70 percent complete a fouryear-college degree. As the work of my Brookings colleague William Frey shows, immigrants are migrants within the U.S., too, moving on from traditional immigrant cities-New York, Los Angeles-to other towns and cities in search of a better future. Entrepreneurial, mobile, aspirational: New Americans are true Americans. We need a lot more of them.

This makes a mockery of our contemporary political "debates" about immigration reform, which have become intertwined with race and racism. Some Republicans tap directly into white fears of an America growing steadily browner. More than four in ten white seniors say that a growing population of immigrants is a "change for the worse"; half of white boomers believe immigration is "a threat to traditional American customs and values." But immigration delves deeper into the question of American identity than it does even issues of race. Immigrants generate more dynamism and aspiration, but they are also unsettling and challenging. Where this debate ends will therefore tell us a great deal about the trajectory of the nation. An America that closes its doors will be an America that has chosen to settle rather than grow, that has allowed security to trump dynamism.

The second big shift needed to get America unstuck is a revival of city and state governance. Since the American Dream is part of the national identity, it seems natural to look to the national government to help make it a reality. But cities are now where the American Dream will live or die. America's hundred biggest metros are home to 67 percent of the nation's population and 75 percent of its economy. Americans love the iconography of the small town, even at the movies—but they watch those movies in big cities.

Powerful mayors in those cities have greater room for maneuvering and making an impact than the average U.S. senator. Even smaller cities and towns can be strongly influenced by their mayor.

The new federalism in part is being born of necessity. National politics is in ruins, and national institutions are weakened by years of short-termism and partisanship. Power,

finding a vacuum in D. C., is diffusive. But it may also be that many of the big domestic-policy challenges will be better answered at a subnational level, because that is where many of the levers of change are to be found: education, family planning, housing, desegregation, job creation, transport, and training. Amid the furor over Common Core and federal standards, it is important to remember that for every hundred dollars spent on education, just nine come from the federal government.

We may be witnessing the end of many decades of national-government dominance in domestic policy-making (the New Deal, Social Security, Medicare, welfare reform, Obamacare). The Affordable Care Act is important in itself, but it may also come to have a place in history as the legislative bookend to a long period of national-policy virtuosity.

The case for the new federalism need not be overstated. There will still be plenty of problems for the national government to fix, including, among the most urgent, infrastructure and nuclear waste. The main tools of macroeconomic policy will remain the Federal Reserve and the federal tax code. But the twentieth-century model of big federal social-policy reforms is in decline. Mayors and governors are starting to notice, and because they don't have the luxury of being stuck, they are forced to be entrepreneurs of a new politics simply to survive.

Itis possible for America to recover its earlier dynamism, but it won't be easy. The big question for Americans is: Do you really want to? Societies, like people, age. They might also settle down, lose some dynamism, trade a little less openness for a little more security, get a bit stuck in their ways. Many of the settled nations of old Europe have largely come to terms with their middle age. They are wary of immigration but enthusiastic about generous welfare systems and income redistribution. Less dynamism, maybe, but more security in exchange.

America, it seems to me, is not made to be a settled society. Such a notion runs counter to the story we tell ourselves about who we are. (That's right, we. We've all come from somewhere else, haven't we? I just got here a bit more recently.) But over time, our narratives become myths, insulating us from the truth. For we are surely stuck, if not settled. And so America needs to decide one way or the other. There are choices to be made. Class divisions are hardening. Upward mobility has a very weak pulse. Race gaps are widening. The worst of all worlds threatens: a European class structure without European welfare systems to dull the pain.

Americans tell themselves and the world that theirs is a society in which each and all can rise, an inspiring contrast to the hereditary cultures from which it sprang. It's one of the reasons I'm here. But have I arrived to raise my children here just in time to be stuck, too? Or will America be America again?









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BY BRIAN FRAZER



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MEN WITH WIGS ACTING LIKE WOMEN, PART 506

The most successful Vine franchise to date. When "dese guys" transform themselves into "dem gals," you won't believe all the crazy stuff that comes out of their falsetto mouths! Projected to be the number-one date Vine in the country when it drops.



LOTS OF PEOPLE CHILLIN'

From the geniuses who brought you 'Two People Chillin', " this time the floating pool furniture just got a little more crowded! SPF Brilliant!



I SHOT THIS OFF THE GIANT VIDEO SCREEN AT THE WEIRD AL YANKOVIC CONCERT WHILE HE WAS **CHANGING COSTUMES!**

"Go out of your way to see this on Oculus Rift!" - Rotten Tomatoes



CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

He's black, she's white! How can they possibly get along for the next six seconds? Buckle your seat belts! Written by a guy who has seen at least a couple of Spike Lee films and once used the *n*-word without getting in trouble.



KYLIE JENNER AND TYGA WASTE WATER

Watch as Kylie and her boy toy help transform a drought into a superdrought by turning on their hose and letting it cascade onto their nine-car driveway. You'll wanna throw a water balloon at those two delightful scamps!



THE MAKING OF "YAWNING ANIMALS **WITH HUMAN VOICES"**

This Vine will do for "Yawning Animals with Human Voices" what Hearts of Darkness did for Apocalypse Now. With nearly four seconds of director's commentary that's unlikely to make any human yawn!



OLD MAN FARTING, YOUNG PEOPLE FLEEING

An American remake of the 2014 Croatian Vine "Starac Prdi, Mladi Bježe." Early word is that it's even better than the original. And maybe even stinkier!



KANYE RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT COUNTDOWN

Advance word says we'll soon see Kanye tearing off a page of his "At-a-Glance" desk calendar to remind us we're only about eighteen hundred days away from his inauguration. The final 5.3 seconds will be credits thanking Kanye for being Kanye.



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